The Anatomy of Shīʿī Shrine Cities: Pivots in World Politics

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations are properly identified.

An earlier version of Chapter Five has been previously published as a journal article by me, titled: "The Ashura Assemblage: Karbala's Religious Urban Fabric and Reproduction of Collective Shiʿi Identity", *Religions*, 12:10 (2021), 904. <doi.org/10.3390/rel12100904>

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Abstract

This thesis is about the enduring importance of Shīʿī shrine cities in world politics. Shrines are important sites of religious identity that are often analysed from a single perspective of conflict, clerical authority, or collective identity in the literature. This thesis overcomes this gap in various ways. It argues that shrines are constructed as 'pivots' in world politics through both clerical authority and collective identity. Semantically, it accepts a dual meaning of 'pivot' as both a generative noun and an agential verb. It presents a conceptual understanding of power with spatial and temporal dimensions. To demonstrate this process, it uses the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ as case studies. The case studies reveal how clerical authority is the most salient temporal pivot in Najaf and collective identity is the most salient spatial pivot in Karbalāʾ. The empirical analyses are respectively dedicated to understanding how Najaf's sacred authority 'pivots' world politics in an agential way during 'critical temporalities', and how Karbalāʾs sacred spaces and ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies have a generative power, which constructs it as a spatial 'pivot' in world politics through its reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity.

Chapter One provides an historical overview of Najaf and Karbalāʾ and traces the evolution of collective Shīʿī identity in shrine cities. Chapter Two details the theoretical framework which draws on theories of clerical authority, temporality, and spatiality. While chapters Three and Four demonstrate the agential power of Najaf's clerical authority using a temporal approach, chapters Five and Six take a spatial approach to illustrate Karbalāʾs generative power as a representation and reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ. By adopting this multidimensional approach, the thesis provides a comprehensive understanding how Shīʿī shrine cities are constructed as pivots in world politics.

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Introduction

Shīʿī shrine cities occupy a paradoxical place in world politics. Shrines located in modern-day Iraq exemplify this point. On one hand, shrines represent religious sublimity and inspire *ziyārat* which is a form of pilgrimage associated with the Prophet Muḥammad, his family members, and descendants. On the other hand, shrines are violently targeted by extreme strands of Sunnī Islam where *ziyārat* is considered a form of *shirk* (idolatry or polytheism). In June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) launched an attack on Mosul with the intention of turning Iraq into a 'living hell' for Shīʿa Muslims, specifically targeting Shīʿī shrines. ISIS spokesperson Abu Muhamad al-Adnani declared the fighting would not take place in Sāmarrāʾ or Baghdad but rather "in Karbalāʾ *al-munajjasah* [the defiled] and Najaf *al-ashrak* [the most polytheistic]".[1] With the Iraqi military unable to protect these holy sites, Iran intervened and deployed its own forces to defend them. The following day, Iraq's highest-ranking Shīʿī authority, Ali al-Sistānī, issued a *fatwā* (religious decree) calling on all able-bodied citizens to defend the country and its holy sites.

Thousands of Iraqis including, Sunnīs, Shīʿīs, and Christians, responded to Sistānī's *jihād* (holy war) *fatwā* titled *Wajib al-Kifai* (collective obligation), precipitating the formation of several militias falling under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF). The reaction to Sistānī's *fatwā* demonstrated both his influence in Iraq and the importance of shrines. Some

[1] Thomas Erdbrink, "In the Shadows of Shrines, Shiite Forces are Preparing to Fight ISIS", *The New York Times*, 26 June 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/27/world/middleeast/in-the-shadows-of-shrines-shiite-forces-are-preparing-to-fight-isis.html.

estimate the PMF attracted between 60,000 to 140,000 volunteers across more than 50 groups.[2] The widespread reaction to Sistānī's *fatwā* was not unexpected, given his influence in Iraq and beyond.

United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon travelled to Najaf one month after Sistānī's *fatwā*, where he met with Sistānī to discuss Iraq's security crisis and necessary humanitarian assistance. Following the meeting, Moon praised Sistānī as "a man of the deepest wisdom and tolerance. He is an inspiration and a role model for his many followers in Iraq and beyond".[3] The meeting highlighted Sistānī's significant influence in Iraq, and the impact of Najaf's clerical establishment in world politics. Sistānī also played a key role in Iraq's reconstruction period, but he was not the first cleric to play an important socio-political role. In fact, a central claim throughout this thesis is that Najaf's clerical authority has played a major role in several key moments in Iraq's history. A phenomenon considerably overlooked in world politics.

Cities and World Politics

Studies on political Islam overwhelmingly focus on Sunnīsm. Studies that do deal with Shīʿīsm tend to focus on the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and Iran's theocratic *Velāyat-e Faqīh*

[2] Renad Mansour and Faleh A. Jabar, "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future", *Carnegie Middle East Center* (April 2017): 1-34.

[3] "Remarks to Press in Najaf, Iraq", *United Nations Secretary-General*, 24 July 2014, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2014-07-24/remarks-press-najaf-iraq.

(Guardianship of the Jurist) system.[4] This overlooks the fact that Najaf has been a centre of Shīʿī clericalism for centuries, and is emblematic of a broader issue in world politics where the nation-state is treated as the basic unit of analysis in world politics.[5] However, with the rise of globalisation studies since the 1970s, researchers have begun to look beyond the nation-state and focus on the role of 'global cities' as key actors in world politics.[6] This approach is not unproblematic, however. For instance, cities like London, Paris, New York, Tokyo and Dubai are recognised for their power in international relations, but they are typically measured by metrics such as capital, trade, business, and demography.[7] This overlooks the importance of

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[4] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future (*New York: Norton & Company, 2007); Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia, 2008); Ray Taykeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); David Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State* ((London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Yvette Hovsepian-Bearce, *The Political Ideology of Ayatollah Khamenei: Out of the Mouth of the Supreme Leader of Iran* (London: Routledge, 2015); Mohammad Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Farhad Rezaei and Ofira Seliktar, *Iran, Revolution, and Proxy Wars* (Cham: Springer Publishing, 2019); Amin Saikal, *Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[5] William I. Robinson, "Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies", *Sociological Forum* 13:4 (1998): 561-594; Neil Brenner, "Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies", *Theory and Society* 28 (1999): 39-78.

[6] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1994); Saskia Sassen, *Cities: Between Global Actors and Local Conditions* (College Park: University of Maryland Press, 1999); Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Introducing a Concept", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11:2 (2005): 27-43; Tassilo Herrschel and Peter Newman, eds., *Cities as International Actors: Urban and Regional Governance Beyond the Nation State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Simon Curtis, *Global Cities and Global Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kent E. Calder and Mriko de Freytas, "Global Political Cities as Actors in Twenty-First Century International Affairs", *SAIS Review* 29:2 (Winter-Spring 2009): 79-97.

[7] This is most clearly expressed in the literature on global cities as core actors in global politics. From this, emerged a literature on city 'paradiplomacy' and the ability of the city to assume an agenda-setting role in local and global politics. See Ari Jerrems, "Theorising International Urban Politics", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 49:1 (2020): 105-116; Heidi Jane M. Smith, "City Networks and Paradiplomacy as Global Public Policy" in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Policy and Transnational Administration*, eds. Diane Stone and Kim Moloney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 129-147; Rodrigo Tavares, *Paradiplomacy: Cities and States as Global Players* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Stanislav

cities that are significant in world politics for reasons other than capital flows and related dynamics.

Before global cities, there were temple communities. Consider, for example, agricultural village communities organised through client-patronage relationships between headmen, wealthy individuals, servants of the gods, and tradesmen.[8] It was not until around 2400BC that temple communities were superseded by the first ancient empire. Despite this change, religion retained a distinct place in Middle East cities. According to Lapidus, in the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries: "Muslim socio-religious communities became the basis of a Middle East wide urban social unit".[9] During this period, Antrim emphasises the importance of "place" in the region, and the attachments to "place" in textual treatises.[10] She notes that by the 9th century, geographies such as Ibn Khurradādhbih and al-Yaʿqūbī divided the world into quarters

E. Shmelev, *Sustainable Cities Reimagined: Multidimensional Assessment and Smart Solutions* (London: Routledge, 2019); Claudio Scardovi, *Sustainable Cities: Big Data, Artificial Intelligence and the Rise of Green, "Cy-phy" Cities* (New York: Springer, 2021).

[8] Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ix.

[9] *Ibid*, xii; See also, Ira M. Lapidus, "The Evolution of Muslim Urban Society", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15:1 (1973): 21-50.

[10] Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

organised on compass point around Baghdad.[11] These spaces developed into lively metropolises, with religio-cultural identities built into the urban fabric of these cities.[12]

These spaces also witnessed violent conflict and contestation.[13] One example is the 1979 Siege of Mecca, where extremist militants seized the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia for several weeks. The siege resulted in several hundred deaths, challenging the authority of the Saudi monarchy, and influencing the development of extremist movements around the world.[14] Another example occurred in the year 2000, when Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Sharon's visit provoked Palestinians and ignited the Al-Aqṣā Intifada, resulting in thousands of deaths over four years.[15] A more recent example involving Shīʿī shrines occurred in 2013 when the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, 10km south of Damascus was targeted by ISIS.[16] This prompted what Isakhan coined the "shrine protection narrative" (SPN), a situation where Shīʿī militias mobilise threats against shrines to achieve geopolitical

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[11] *Ibid*, 102; Abū l-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Kurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, in *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. Michael J.D. Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967); Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb al-Yaʿqūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, in *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* ed. Michael J.D. Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967).

[12] Relli Shechter and Haim Yacobi, "Cities in the Middle East: Politics, Representation and History", *Cities* 22:3 (2005): 183-188; Bruce Stanley, "Middle East City Networks and the "New Urbanism", *Cities* 22:3 (2005): 189-199; Haim Yacobi and Mansour Nasasra, eds., *Routledge Handbook on Middle East Cities* (London: Routledge, 2020).

[13] Nelida Fuccaro, ed., *Violence and the City in the Modern Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[14] Nasir al-Huzaimi and David Commins, *The Mecca Uprising: An Insider's Account of Salafism and Insurrection in Saudi Arabia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

[15] Jeremy Pressman, "The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23:2 (2003): 114-141.

[16] Juan Cole, "Syria: Attack on Sayyida Zainab Provokes Sunni-Shiite Tensions in Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan", *Informed Consent*, 22 July 2013, https://www.juancole.com/2013/07/provokes-tensions-pakistan.html.

goals.[17] Studies on holy cities and world politics tend to focus on these themes of contestation and conflict.[18] However, depicting the link between holy cities and world politics as one based on conflict and contestation simplifies these complex urban centres of religious identity, history and power.

In addition to the role of holy cities in conflicts and contestations, the literature acknowledges certain cities' wider impact within world politics, primarily the international relations of the Holy See.[19] While the Vatican's engagement in world politics has been extensively studied, almost no scholarship has taken into account the significance of non-Western holy cities in shaping world politics. There is a need to investigate the broader role of these cities in world politics, beyond their association with conflict and contestation. In this sense, the key question animating this thesis is: *How are Shīʿī shrine cities constructed as 'pivots' in world politics?*

The Pivot Puzzle

In order to answer this question, in the first instance it is important to note that Shīʿī shrines play an important role in world politics. If they are widely recognised as central to Shīʿī

[17] Benjamin Isakhan, "The Islamic State Attacks on Shia Holy Sites and the "Shrine Protection Narrative": Threats to Sacred Space as a Mobilisation Frame", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32:4 (2020): 724-748.

[18] Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Michael Dumper, *Power, Piety, and People: The Politics of Holy Cities in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

[19] Daniel A. Binchy, "The Vatican and International Diplomacy", *International Affairs* 22:1 (1946): 47-56; Robert A. Graham, *Vatican Diplomacy – A Study of Church and State on the International Plane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Robert B. Shelledy, "The Vatican's Role in Global Politics", *The SAIS Review of International Faith* 24:2 (2004): 149-162; Timothy A. Byrnes, "Sovereignty, Supranationalism and Soft Power: The Holy See in International Relations", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15:4 (2017): 6-20.

particular history, memory and scholarship, little research has been conducted onto their more *general* significance for world politics.[20] This thesis aims to address this gap by investigating how Shīʿī shrine cities impact or 'pivot' world politics through two main frames: clerical power and collective transnational identity. It examines the relative importance of these pivots over time, arguing that collective identity is most salient in Karbalāʾ and clerical power is most salient in Najaf. This thesis accepts a dual meaning of pivot, as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, a pivot is "the central point, pin, or shaft on which a mechanism turns or oscillates".[21] As a verb, pivot means: "to turn or balance on a central point".[22] This thesis uses the term as a noun to describe how Karbalāʾ is a *pivot* in world politics through its reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity, based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ which commemorates the martyrdom of Imām al- Ḥusayn at the 680 Battle of Karbalāʾ. It uses the term as a verb to describe the way Najaf's clerical power turns or *pivots* world politics.

The Gap

Outside the Shīʿī world, little research exists on Karbalāʾs role in world politics. The Global War on Terror (WoT) and the ascendence of international security studies (ISS) has minimised Karbalāʾs significance to simplistic ideological tropes of militant resistance, with studies examining the relevance of the Karbalāʾ narrative in world politics, and its subjective

[20] This use of "world politics" accept Acharya's notion that "Global" is socially constructed: "Global is what people and other actors make of it. Global is not 'international'". See Antonia Witt, Felix Anderl, Scarlett Cornelissen, Amitav Acharya, Isaac Kamola and Deepshiska Shahi, "How to Problematize the Global?", *Millennium* 0:0 (April 2023): 1-48, 41. For a recent elaboration on this matter, see John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, *The Globalisation of World Politics*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[21] "Pivot, noun", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[22] "Pivot, verb", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

ideological applicability to transient Shīʿī militia groups.[23] However, this approach overlooks the broader historical significance of the Karbalāʾ narrative as a universal story of good versus evil, with Imām al- Ḥusayn representing the ideal human, akin to Jesus Christ. The enduring importance of the Karbalāʾ narrative is a powerful source of collective identity, co-constitutively reproduced through tangible sacred spaces imbued with historical meaning, and intangible ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and practices. By emphasising transient political and geopolitical applications of Karbalāʾ, studies fail to acknowledge its religious, historical, and cultural significance as a source of collective identity, animating its construction as a pivot in world politics.

Research on the impact of Najaf's clerical authority in world politics are limited.[24] Studies on the clerical authority's engagement with world politics predominantly centre on its interactions with British colonialism and American imperialism, disregarding other important aspects of its engagement with world politics. Although the role of *jihād fatwās* and the authority's interactions with various forms of imperialism are indeed crucial to its construction in world

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[23] Jeffry R. Halverson, Harold L. Goodall, Steven R. Corman, eds., *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2011); Younes Saramifar, "Lamenting the Real and Crying for the Really Real: Searching for Silences and Mourning Martyrdom Amongst Iranian Volunteer Militants", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 29:3 (2018): 282-297; Younes Saramifar, "Circling Around the Really Real in Iran: Ethnography of Muharram Laments Among Shiʿi Volunteer Militants in the Middle East", *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 88 (2020): 76-88.

[24] A notable exception is Alshamary's study on the institutional responsibility of Iraq *ḥawza* and its participation in protest movements. See Marsin Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests: Religious Leaders and Protest in Iraq" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020); While Iraq's clerical authority remains understudied and often overshadowed by examinations on Iran's theocratic system, some notable exceptions are worth mentioning. Cole, Nakash and Litvak have written foundational studies on Iraq's Shīʿīte clerical authority. See Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Meir Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq: The ʿulamāʾ of Najaf and Karbalāʾ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

politics, a disproportionate focus on these areas has resulted in a lack of attention to its more nuanced instances of advocacy in other domains of world politics.[25] For example, the clerical authority actively engages with the Vatican, and has a history of engagement with international institutions such as the UN and the League of Nations. Therefore, this thesis broadens the scope of research on the advocacy of Najaf's clerical authority to offer a more comprehensive understanding of its engagement with world politics.

The Argument: Karbalāʾ as a 'Pivot' in World Politics

The thesis argues that Karbalāʾ possesses generative power as the central point or pin of Shīʿī identity and history because of its inherent association to ʿĀshūrāʾ.[26] Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics because the Karbalāʾ narrative is "the axis around which all of history revolves for the Shīʿīs".[27] Its importance as a spatial reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Shīʿī Islam

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[25] In IR, *advocacy* is considered a key institution in world politics. See Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); According to Buzan, "Transnational Society" consists of interactions between transnational actors. See Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 120.

[26] 'Generative' refers to power that is inherent in social structures, institutions and systems that shape and influence the actions and behaviours of individuals. In his concept of 'habitus', Bourdieu discusses the generative power of social structures and institutions in shaping individual actions and behaviours through the internalisation of social norms, values, and practices. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Giddens' structuration theory also highlights the generative power of social structures to create and sustain patterns of behaviour and social order. Importantly, he makes the point that social structures and institutions are produced and reproduced through individual action. See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Foucault also emphasises the generative power of discourses and institutional practices, arguing that power is not simply repressive, but also productive and generates new modes of subjectivity. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Prentice Hill, 1980). Of particular relevance to this thesis, institutions such as ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals are generative sources of identification. They are not in themselves collective identities but represent productive sources of collective identity. Barth describes institutions as generative of identification. See Fredrik Barth, "Models of Social Organisation", *Royal Anthropological Institute – Occasional Paper* 23 (1966): 1-32.

[27] Kamran Aghaie, "Gender-coded Symbols and Public Religious Rituals in Post-Revolutionary Iran", *Islamic Studies* 43:1 (Spring 2004): 79-101, 80. It is essential to distinguish this particular use of 'pivot'

cannot be overstated. The well-known phrase attributed to the sixth Shīʿī Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) – "Every day is ʿĀshūrāʾ and every land is Karbalāʾ" succinctly captures the city's centrality in Shīʿī Islam.[28]

To fully acknowledge the influence of Shīʿī Islam in world politics, its association with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, or its extensive global following of approximately 157 million to 204 million adherents, one cannot ignore Karbalāʾs critical role as the spiritual source and central point of this force.[29] Literature on collective Shīʿī identity revolves around Karbalāʾs relevance to ʿĀshūrāʾ and ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals. *ʿĀshūrāʾ* (the tenth) is the climax of Muharram, the 40-day mourning month in Shīʿī Islam. It commemorates the death of Imām al-Ḥusayn at the 680CE Battle of Karbalāʾ.[30] Shīʿītes believe Imām al-Ḥusayn gave his life fighting for justice, sacrificing himself for the Muslim community. Imām al-Ḥusayn plays a similar role in Shīʿīsm as Jesus Christ does in Christianity. That is, as a figure who

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from Mackinder's archaic and deeply problematic notion of the "pivot state" in Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal* 23:4 (April 1904): 421-437. Although both terms refer to geographic centrality, they are not transposable. While Mackinder's concept implies inherent geopolitical value and is problematically associated with social Darwinism, this thesis' use of 'pivot' denotes only geospatial centrality, which has etymological similarity with the former. Rather than a geopolitical pivot, Karbalāʾ is a geospatial pivot of collective Shīʿī identity. In 1989, Harvey reminded geographers of the "tortured history of geopolitical thinking and practice in the twentieth century and the difficulty geographers have had in confronting the thorny issues involved". See David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80:3 (1990): 418-434, 430.

[28] Shari'ati attributes this phrase to Imām al-Ṣādiq in a speech titled "Ḥusayn, warith-I Adam". See Dr. Ali Shari'ati, "Ali Shariati Hossein Is Heir To Adam علی شریعتی حسین وارث آدم", *archive.org*, 10 November 2013, https://archive.org/details/AliShariatiHosseinIsHeirToAdam.

[29] "Islam in Asia: Diversity in Past and Present Exhibition: Muslim Populations", *Cornell University Library*, April 2017, https://guides.library.cornell.edu/islamasiaexhibit/muslimpopulations. For Iranian relations with Hezbollah, see Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Why does Iran need Hizbullah?", *The Muslim World* 106:1 (2016): 127-140; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Proxy Relations: Iran and Hezbollah", in *Routledge Handbook of International Relations in the Middle East*, ed. Shahram Akbarzadeh (New York: Routledge, 2019), 321-329.

[30] The battle of Karbalāʾ is discussed in Chapter One.

straddles the temporal and cosmic realms, between humanity and divinity. Both figures function as liminal heroes who attain "victory through defeat, pleasure through suffering, eternality through morality".[31] It is this eternality through mortality that is commemorated annually during Muharram rituals.

The chapters that follow cover these rituals in detail. At this point, it is important to emphasise that elaborate rituals throughout West Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean commemorate ʿĀshūrāʾ, contributing to the reproduction of a collective transnational identity centred on Karbalāʾ.[32] As such, not only does Karbalāʾ reproduce collective identity from within, but it also evokes a sense of 'Karbalāʾ from other locations through the collective memory of ʿĀshūrāʾ. As Deeb notes: "Historically, both the structure and the meaning of '*Ashura* and these lamentation events have been fluid, incorporating different elements in different locales and reflecting the changing and political social status of Shiʿa Muslims".[33] Having established how Karbalāʾs generative sources of collective identity formation and

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[31] Tasi Bradford Perkins, "The Thirst, and the Sun, and the Bleeding": Ḥusayn as a Passible Liminal Figure in Pro-ʿAlid Hagiography" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2022), 254.

[32] For a useful starting point, see Toby M. Howarth, *The Twelver Shiʿa as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears* (London: Routledge, 2005); Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbalāʾ: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Karen G. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Every Practice in South Asian Shiʿism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land: Shiʿism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Sohoni and Tschacher demonstrate the vibrancy of non-Shīʿa practices of Muharram rituals. See Pushkar Sohoni and Torsten Tschacher, eds., *Non-Shia Practices of Muḥarram in South Asia and the Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2021); Frank Korom, "Reconciling the Local and the Global: The Ritual Space of Shiʿi Islam in Trinidad", *Journal of Ritual Studies* 13:1 (1999): 21-36; Frank Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muḥarram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Peter J. Chelkowski, "From the Sun-Scorched Desert of Iran to the Beaches of Trinidad: Taʿziyeh's Journey from Asia to the Caribbean", *TDR: The Drama Review* 49:1 (2005): 156-170.

[33] Lara Deeb, "From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedeh Zaynab, Lebanese Shiʿi Women, and the Transformation of Ashura" in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. Kamran Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 241.

reproduction construct it as the central 'pin' or 'point' of Shīʿī history and identity in world politics, it is necessary to outline how 'pivot' is operationalised as a verb in its agential form.

Najaf's 'Pivoting' of World Politics

Najaf is a significant city in Shīʿīsm because it houses the shrine of Imām ʿAlī, the first Imām in Shīʿī Islam, cousin, and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, and father of Imām al-Ḥusayn. It is also home to many other important religious sites and institutions including the *Ḥawza Al-Ilmiyya*, a prestigious religious seminary considered to be one of the most important centres of Shīʿī learning in the world. With the support of the Buyid Dynasty (934-1062), Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Tūsī (b. 995 CE) established a scholarly circle in Najaf and was first to use the term *Ḥawza Al-Ilmiyya* (circle of knowledge).[34] Many influential Shīʿī scholars and theologians subsequently studied and taught at Najaf's *ḥawza*. Because of the socio-religious significance of its *ḥawza*, Najaf has played an important role in the political history of Iraq and the wider region.[35] Historically, Najaf's clerical authority, also known as the Najafi *marjaʿiyya* ("source of emulation pl."), has influenced regional and world politics during times of uprising, revolution, and Iraq's political reconstitution post-2003.

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[34] However, Najaf did not regain this scholarly status until the late 17th century. See Zackery M. Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf", *Iranian Studies* 50 (2017): 415-438, 418.

[35] Several subsequent works have examined Najaf's clerical authority, the structure of its educational *Ḥawza Al-Ilmiyya* institution, its transnational networks, and its influence during times of protest. See, Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Caroleen Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs: Nationalism in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Linda Walbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shi'a* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Zackery M. Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism: Islamic Reform in Iraq and Iran* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015); Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests: Religious Leaders and Protest in Iraq"; Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf: Myth and History of the Shīʿī Ḥawza": Khalid Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shī'ite Identity: The Ḥawzas of al-Najaf and Qumm as a Case Study", *Middle East Studies* 43:6 (2007): 831-856.

This thesis argues that Najaf's clerical authority 'pivots' world politics through advocacy across various levels of world politics. Historically, the clerical authority "turns" or "balances" world politics through differentiated modes of advocacy such as *fatwas, bayans*, and other forms of outreach.[36] The term 'pivot' is deployed as a verb to convey the agential way Najaf's clerical authority 'pivots' world politics.[37] This usage of 'pivot' implies a form of power that is active, as demonstrated through the historical trajectory of Najaf's clerical authority and its engagement with world politics. This thesis examines two interrelated modes of advocacy: advocacy to followers and advocacy aimed at international audiences.

Najaf's clerical authority pivots world politics through *fatwas* on matters of self-determination and sovereignty. This includes outright declarations of holy war. However, is important to note that while Sistānī's 2014 *jihād fatwā* was a significant event in world politics, it is by no means anomalous in the history of Najaf's clerical authority. The clerical authority routinely engages with its followers on numerous issues ranging from personal and practical jurisprudence to advocacy for inter-sect and inter-faith harmony. It also pivots world politics through its engagement with institutions of international relations, actively demonstrated through its interactions with the League of Nations in the inter-war years and the UN post-1945, as well

[36] *Fatwās* are religiously binding legal decrees. *Bayans* are opinions or statements of religious attitudes that fall short of a fully-fledged *fatwā* but are still official pronouncements.

[37] Closely associated with the notion of 'agency', active or agential power refers the capacity of individuals or groups to act intentionally and influence social outcomes. It emphasises the agency of individuals to contest or transform dominant social structures. See Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Karan Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

as a history of inter-faith engagement with the Vatican. Having outlined the dual meaning of pivot, the following section introduces this thesis' theoretical framework.

A Temporal and Spatial Approach to Shīʿī Shrine Cities

This thesis examines how temporal and spatial dimensions of power construct Najaf and Karbalāʾ as pivots in world politics. Najaf's agential power is understood temporally through the historical trajectory of its sacred authority, while Karbalāʾs generative power is understood spatially through the way its sacred spaces and transnational ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals productively reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. The theoretical approach of this thesis, developed more thoroughly in chapter Two, attempts provide a new way of understanding these distinct dimensions of power constructing Shīʿī shrines as pivots in world politics.

Temporality remains a relatively peripheral dimension of mainstream IR.[38] However, timing, as intellectual and practical synthesis, establishes connections between people, events, and processes. It is a useful tool in Hom's words, for "connecting the past to the present for the purpose of reflexive critique".[39] Narrative timing through process sociology offers IR durable knowledge by highlighting contingency and dynamism which reconnects time with social

[38] Hutchings notes that "even IR scholars of time lack a philosophical vocabulary to the challenge". See Kimberly Hutchings, "Happy Anniversary! Time and Critique in International Relations Theory", *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007): 71-89, 83; Similarly, Gallois regards Time as the "great *unsaid* in western historical thought". See William Gallois, *Time, Religion, and History* (Essex: Longman, 2007), 1; Hom argues that Waltz' positivistic and structural theory of realism might have damaged IR's wider viability. Andrew Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 123; Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

[39] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 211.

subjectivity.[40] This thesis focuses on two temporal case studies: 1911-1920 and 2003-2014, as useful "closed experimental spaces" which allow theorists to:

> rerun experimental sequences with near perfect temporal symmetry and to check their conditionality variance and reliability because we have drastically reduced the quantity and complexity of change continua compared to the open time bound.[41]

The two case studies are posed as "critical temporalities" which Hom describes as "extensive and repeated encounters with discordant change".[42] Both temporalities implicated Najaf's clerical authority in much larger changes in world politics. This thesis argues that Najaf's clerical authority are particularly active or agential in world politics when the institutional integrity of the *ḥawza* is threatened. Often, this comes in the form of colonial or imperial interference in Iraq's political field. Dodge draws parallels between Britain's colonisation of Iraq in 1920 and the 2003 US-led invasion as two impositions of order on an international system perceived to be both fractured and dangerously unstable.[43] He notes that, both US President Woodrow Wilson and President George W. Bush, circa 1920 and 2003 respectively, "sought to reimpose stability by reworking the existing Westphalian notion of state sovereignty".[44] The case studies examined in this thesis represent critical temporalities because both implicate Najaf's clerical class in broader developments playing out in the international system. The period preceding the establishment of the British Mandate (1911-1919) represents

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[40] *Ibid*, 18, 215.

[41] *Ibid*, 139.

[42] *Ibid*, 235.

[43] Toby Dodge, "The Contradictions of Exogenous State-building in Historical Perspective", *Third World Quarterly* 27:1 (2006): 187-206, 189.

[44] *Ibid*, 190.

a critical temporality because the clerical authority sought to unify various segments of Iraqi society over a common identity and shared anti-colonial rhetoric. The period following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq represents a critical temporality because Iraq's institutional state capacities were decimated, and its political field was subsequently contested by a plurality of local and international political actors.

Hom offers four distinct timing devices which provide a more "throughgoing account of critical temporalities".[45] These include: 'synoptic theme' as a timing standard, 'creative filtration' as a means of determining what processes matter, 'cleaving experience' which establishes the story's 'durative presence', and 'concordant discordance' which reinterprets unintelligible and overwhelming experiences as key plot drivers.[46] Confounding events such as the advocacy of Najaf's clerical authority during periods of imperial impositions of order become productive links to broader local and international developments. Collectively, these devices establish a plot that synthesises heterogeneous experiences into a meaningful synthesis.[47] Chapters Three and Four reveal how instances of concordant discordance materialise as both constitutive plot drivers and unsurprising outcomes. In doing so, this approach of processual sociology demonstrates how historical IR can offer general claims about the past while also providing new interpretations of the present.[48] Having outlined the temporal approach utilised for Najaf, the next section will outline the spatial approach used for Karbalāʾ.

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[45] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 22.

[46] *Ibid*, 82; Chapter Two elaborates further on these devices.

[47] *Ibid*, 85.

[48] Andrew Abbott, *Processual Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

A Spatial Approach to Karbalāʾs Spaces and Rituals of Collective Identity

The constitution of space and spatiality have serious theoretical and practical implications which are often overlooked in IR. Weaver points out that, "from the founding of IR at the start of the 20th century space was taken as given".[49] Lambach expresses a similar sentiment stating: "The inability of IR to grapple with geographical concepts is a recurring critique of the discipline".[50] A key symptom of this issue is the global linearisation of borders, a phenomenon which Goettlich argues, "is historically recent and constitutive of international politics, in contrast with other accounts of the origins of modern international politics, which take borders as simply an expression of territorial sovereignty".[51] Lambach proposes a framework that treats "space not as a static container but as the momentary outcome of processes of social construction".[52] Westphalian notion of states inherited Descarte's "Cartesian cogito", which rendered space measurable, rationalised and expanse that can be quantified and conquered.[53] Weaver notes that this Cartesian space represents what Sassen termed "a unified

[49] Duncan Weaver, "Spatiality and World Politics", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (June 2020): 1-37, 1; Chaturvedi and Painter deemed spatiality a "neglected dimension of world order". See Sanjay Chaturvedi and Joe Painter, "Whose World, Whose Order?: Spatiality, Geopolitics and the Limits of the World Order Concept", *Cooperation and Conflict* 42:4 (2007): 375-395, 376

[50] David Lambach, "Space, Scale, and Global Politics: Towards a Critical Approach to Space in International Relations", *Review of International Studies* 48:2 (2021): 282-300; Beth A. Simmons and Hein E. Goemans, "Built on Borders: Tensions with the Institution Liberalism (thought it) Left Behind", *International Organization* 22 (2021): 1-24.

[51] Kerry Goettlich, "The Rise of Linear Borders in World Politics", *European Journal of International Relations* 25:1 (2019): 203-228, 222-223.

[52] Lambach, "Space, Scale, and Global Politics", 283. This framework is elaborated on in Chapter Two.

[53] Goettlich, "The Rise of Linear Borders in World Politics", 213.

spatiotemporality".[54] This echoes Agnew's concept of the "Territorial trap" which involves "the privileging of a territorial conception of the state".[55] Walker made analogous observations on how the "division of labour between political theory and theories of international relations led to an understanding of the state that is both spatially reductionist and historically static".[56] In other words, to view space purely as a storehouse for state sovereignty overlooks the complex interactions between state and non-state actors shaping its constitution.[57]

Because of this complex constitution of space, this thesis approaches spatiality as socially constructed, involving an interplay between ideational and material factors. Lefebvre pioneered the notion that space is both a socially constituted phenomenon and a product of society.[58] Weaver points out that "Generated or generative, spatiality bears a strong resemblance with the work of Soja, who identified and advocated a spatialised reading of social theory".[59] Lambach

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[54] Weaver, "Spatiality and World Politics"; Saskia Sassen, "Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization", *Public Culture* 12:1 (2000): 215-230, 215; Warf argues this Cartesian space served Western hegemony and its projection of power across the globe. See Barney Warf, "From Surfaces to Networks" in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 55-76, 62.

[55] John Agnew and Stuart Crobridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1995), 83.

[56] R.B.J Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 125.

[57] As Goettlich notes "'territorial sovereignty' is too underspecified to carry the conceptual burden that the historical IR literature has placed on it. Territory, borders and sovereignty are not the same thing, and while they seem to coincide today, assuming that they evolved simultaneously risks confusion". See Goettlich, "The Rise of Linear Borders in World Politics", 205.

[58] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).

[59] Weaver, "Spatiality and World Politics", 18; Soja subsequently reworked Lefebvre's "trialectic of spatial practice, representation of space, space of representation" as "perceived-conceived-lived spaces". See Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 25; Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1966).

notes that "Soja's notion of 'social space' is distinct from but enmeshed in 'both material space of physical nature and the ideational space of human nature a spatial approach needs to make clear how space affects, and is affected by materiality and ideas".[60] In other words, space is productive and processual.[61] A spatial approach treats space as socially constructed, and sacred sites are examples of how spaces are imbued with specific meanings.[62] Moreover, non-human objects and assemblages can have agency and are thus productive.[63] As such, this thesis ascribes an ontological status to space with productive power which independently exerts causal force or productive effects, rather than being a simple by-product of other social processes.

Chapter Five begins this explication of spatiality by introducing the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage.[64] It establishes the importance of spatial sites of religious memory, as productive and generative sources of collective identity which contribute to Karbalāʾs construction a pivot in world

[60] Lambach, "Space, Scale, and Global Politics"; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Verso, 1989), 120.

[61] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); Löw defines space as "a relations arrangement of bodies that is incessantly in motion". See Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space, Materiality, Social Structures and Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 106.

[62] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference", *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 6-23.

[63] Michele Acuto and Simon Curtis, eds., *Reassembling International Relations Theory: Assemblage Thinking and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

[64] The socio-spatial element of this theory's application to Karbalāʾ is outlined in Aidan Parkes, "The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage: Karbalāʾs Religious Urban Fabric and Reproduction of Collective Shīʿī Identity", *Religions* 12:10 (2021): 904; This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Australian National University (Protocol 2021/521) Approved 23/09/2021.

politics.[65] Karbalāʾ is well known for housing the shrines of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his half-brother Al-ʿAbbās. Less well known is the assemblage of historically contingent spatial devices: ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spots, spaces and places in and around Karbalāʾ.[66] These sites are important sources of collective identification, which serve as cognitive reminders of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage includes primary sites such as the shrines of Imam al-Ḥusayn and Al-ʿAbbās. It also includes less prominent sites such as Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment before the Battle of Karbalāʾ, and the "Zaynab Hillock", a mosque resembling the hill which Zaynab, Ḥusayn's sister sat atop during the Battle of Karbalāʾ. These replica edifices within the Assemblage signify important historical spots leading up to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Chapter Six approaches Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity through its associated ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies. It outlines how these sources productively reproduce collective identity. Collective Shīʿī identity is sometimes conceptualised through the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'. Fischer coined the term 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' in 1983 to describe how ʿĀshūrāʾ, in his words,

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[65] Ernste, Van Houtum and Zoomer's notion of the contemporary "trans-world" is worth noting. They argue that "increased inter-linkages between place and people are increasingly loosening and dynamising the classic triangle of territory-identity-citizenship". See Huib Ernste, Henk V Houtum and Annelies Zoomers, "Trans-World: Debating the Place and Borders of Places in the Age of Transnationalism", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 100:5 (2009): 577-586, 578. In addition to the broader literature contained within the sociology of space or "power of place", Chapter Five also demonstrates how anthropological insights from cultural heritage enrich understandings of Karbalāʾs urban geography.

[66] Heather Sutherland, "Contingent Devices" in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and the Politics of Space*, eds. Henk S. Nordholy and Remco Raben (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 20-59.

> Provides models for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live: there is a set of parables and moral lessons all connected with or part of the story of Karbalāʾ which are themselves not obviously contradictory and to which almost all of lives problems can be referred.[67]

The 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' has been used by scholars to describe the significance of the Battle of Karbalāʾ in Shīʿī identity thought and memory. It has also been used to describe a variety of phenomena ranging from the martyrdom's narrational utilisation, various dramatisations, and as a way of differentiating Shīʿī rituals or "modes of piety".[68] However, the Karbalāʾ paradigm is often presented in binary terms such as active and passive, modern and revolutionary, and traditional and salvific.[69] To avert this, Chapter Six utilises the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' as a key source of collective Shīʿī identity. It describes its components, then outlines its layers and components and socio-institutional manifestations. This inclusive departure from the so-called "Karbalāʾ Paradigm" privileges stipulative local understandings over existing lexical constructs.

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[67] Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 21.

[68] Deeb, "Living Ashura in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25:1 (2005):122-137; Kamran Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shiʿi Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1982); Nikkie Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); David Pinault, *The Shiʿites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992); Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʿAshūrā in Twelver Shiʿism* (New York: Mouton, 1978); Peter Chelkowski, *Taʿziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1979); Fischer, *Iran*; Mary Hegland, "A Mixed Blessing: The *Majales* - Shi'a Women's Rituals of Mourning in Northwest Pakistan" in *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross Culturally*, eds. Judy Brink and Joan Mincher (New York & London: Routledge Press, 1997), 179-199.

[69] Mary Hegland, "Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village" in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiʿism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikkie Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 218-236.

Local understandings are central to notions of place-making in Area Studies. Geertz established that local understandings are essential to informed studies on geographies of knowledge because the granularities that form a society's fabric cannot be captured by taxonomical state-centric approaches.[70] Wolf postulated that Area Studies, in search of "local understandings", led researchers to overlook connections and unequal power relationships extending beyond regions.[71] However, Daniels supported the notion that local understandings help understand how landscapes act as both a "way of life" and a "way of seeing".[72] Chapters Five and Six utilise local understandings to demonstrate how landscapes act as both a "way of life" and a "way of seeing".

Methods and Limitations

This thesis takes a qualitative approach centred on interviews, primary and secondary source data, with a theoretical framing.[73] The tacking between empirical observation and theory development are the principal points of methodological reference in this thesis. This methodology is appropriate for two reasons. First, given the nature of Najaf's clerical authority, substantive empirical primary sources are applied to pre-existing concepts and theories relevant to this topic. Second, the method is suitable given the availability of verifiable, well-researched data, and the difficulties involved in conducting primary research to yield data of comparable

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[70] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[71] Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[72] Stephen Daniels, "Marxism, Culture, and the Duplicity of Landscape" in *New Models of Geography*, eds. Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 404-452, 424.

[73] Yin describes the benefits of the qualitative case study as "revelatory". See Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012), 49.

utility, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic when international travel and opportunities for extended periods of in-country fieldwork were curtailed.

This thesis' adoption of methodological pluralism falls under the broad umbrella of 'analytic eclecticism'.[74] Sil and Katzenstein identify three characteristics of this approach as follows:

> First, it proceeds at least implicitly on the basis of a pragmatist ethos, manifested concretely in the search for middle-range theoretical arguments that potentially speak to concrete issues of policy and practice. Second, it addresses problems of wide scope that, in contrast to more narrowly parsed research puzzles designed to test theories or fill in gaps within research traditions, incorporate more of the complexity and messiness of particular real-world situations. Third, in constructing substantive arguments related to these problems, analytic eclecticism generates complex causal stories that forgo parsimony in order to capture the interactions among different types of causal mechanisms normally analysed in isolation from each other within separate research traditions.[75]

The authors' second and third points are particularly relevant to this thesis. This methodology is useful because it allows necessary space for each city to be approached based on its distinct features and characteristics. For instance, the clerical class in Najaf have exercised sacred authority for centuries. Likewise, Karbalāʾ, as a spatial reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ has reproduced collective identity for centuries. In this sense, the temporal and spatial approaches present suitable methodological approaches for each city. As noted, temporality and spatiality are peripheral concepts in mainstream IR, typically treated as self-evident. This thesis challenges

[74] For a useful illustration of this method, see Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics: Reconfiguring Problems and Mechanisms across Research Traditions", *Perspectives on Politics* 8:2 (2010): 411- 431; Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 2010).

[75] *Ibid*, 412.

this assumption through its interdisciplinary methodological pluralism and privileging of local understandings over theoretical constructs.[76]

While both cities are key to collective transnational Shīʿī identity, their modes of significance are considerably distinct. For this reason, archival research, consultation of primary and secondary sources, and content analysis are utilised to elicit useful findings in the case of Najaf. In the case of Karbalāʾ where collective identity is most salient, a different methodological toolkit is required. This involves less focus on theoretical constructs and archival research, and more emphasis on digital ethnography such as asynchronous digital interviews.[77] Discussing

[76] This approach might resemble but does not necessarily aspire to contribute to ongoing debates concerning the utility of "Global IR" and "deep pluralism". See Amitav Acharya, "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions", *International Studies Review* 18:1 (2016): 4–15; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*; Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya, *Re-imagining International Relations: World Orders in the Thought and Practice of Indian, Chinese, and Islamic Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Deploying interdisciplinary approaches that bridge the gap between Area-Studies and various disciplinary social sciences is not a new concept. However, it has gained more attention recently due to the reflexive turn of International Relations towards questioning its inherent Western-centric and Eurocentric biases, as well as potential racism. See Errol A. Henderson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26:1 (2023): 71-92. This has prompted turns to new terms such as Global International Relations (GIR) and Global International Society (GIS). See Acharya, "Advancing Global IR"; Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*; Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*; Trine Flockhart and Zachary Paikin, eds., *Rebooting Global International Society: Change, Contestation and Resilience* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Feng Zhang, ed., *Pluralism and World Order: Theoretical Perspectives and Policy Challenges* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Hendrik Spruyt, *The World Imagined: Collective Beliefs and Political Order in the Sinocentric, Islamic and Southeast Asian International Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Criticisms of Global IR argue that it risks "becoming yet another 'universal knowledge project' that uses ambiguous and invisible normative benchmarks yet claims openness and inclusivity". See Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, "Problematising the Global in Global IR", *Millennium* 49:1 (2020): 32-57, 55; Ersel Aydinli and Onur Erpul, "The False Promise of Global IR: Exposing the Paradox of Dependent Development", *International Theory* 14:3 (2021): 419-459; Witt, Anderl, Cornelissen, Acharya, Kamola and Shahi, "How to Problematize the Global?".

[77] This method gained prominence with researchers during the Covid-19 pandemic, where domestic or international travel and face-to-face interviews were, at worst, not possible or, at best, limited and

asynchronous digital or email interviews as opposed to in-person interviews, Ratislavova and Ratislav note, "The asynchronous email interview will never fully replace traditional face-to-face interviews but it could gain a solid position as a qualitative method thanks to its unique benefits".[78] The qualitative results generated in this thesis support this observation, giving weight to the granularities of Karbalāʾ and Najaf as bastions of collective Shīʿī identity and sacred authority respectively.

The thesis was conducted under the ANU Human Ethics protocol 2021/521, approved 23 September 2021.[79] This involved digital ethnographic interviews with various Shīʿī intellectuals based in the shrine cities of Karbalāʾ and Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. The respondents represent a unique epistemic community of intellectuals intimately associated with Shīʿī shrine cities, occupationally, ideationally, and lineally. Various digital platforms were used to conduct interviews, including email, Telegram and WhatsApp. Interviews were mainly conducted in English, while the remainder were conducted in Arabic and transcribed into English. All participants possessed tertiary university levels of education.

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unsatisfactory. However, the value of asynchronous email interviews had been established prior to this. See for instance, Sarah Schrire, "Knowledge Building in Asynchronous Discussion Groups: Going Beyond Quantitative Analysis", *Computers and Education* 46:1 (January 2006): 49-70; Kateřina Ratislavová and Jakub Ratislav, "Asynchronous Email Interview as a Qualitative Research Method in the Humanities", *Human Affairs* 24 (2014): 452-460; Daniela Schiek and Carsten G. Ullrich, "Using Asynchronous Written Online Communications for Qualitative Inquires: a Research Note", *Qualitative Research* 17:5 (2017): 589-597.

[78] Ratislavova and Ratislav, "Asynchronous Email Interview As a Qualitative Research Method in the Humanities", 1.

[79] The initial 2020 protocol was terminated following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participants' interview consent was obtained in all cases, and follow-up quotation attributions were confirmed using the platforms mentioned above. Interviews varied in duration and frequency, as did sampling questions and their snowballing trajectories. Data was collected, iteratively refined, and clarified through several follow-up informal interviews. Representational tools were combined with digital ethnographic interviews as a means of illustrating the findings. Using the Integrated Programming Environment (IPE) extensible drawing editor software package 7.2.24, LaTex source code was utilised to create, edit, render, and analyse cartographic maps and vector graphics.[80] These maps and graphics were adapted and rendered using multiple layers and primitive geometric objects such as polylines, arcs, spline curves and descriptive text. The apparatus for the vector graphics were tailored to emphasise the sacred spaces central to Karbalāʾ's reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. To ensure accuracy, the details and data depicted in the vector graphics were then iteratively refined and verified by custodians of Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy shrine and third-party data repositories. The relatively modest sample size of interviewees can be regarded as satisfactory, given the unique status and positionality of these informants in the history of collective transnational Shiʿism. Depicting and mapping the data across several vector graphics and diagrams required the development of cartographic maps, rendered according to urban geographic data. The research was triangulated using ethnography, secondary sources, and open-source databases.[81] Having established this methodological approach of this thesis, the following sections provides an outline of each chapter.

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[80] IPE is a commercially available free software package downloaded from and available at: https://ipe.otfried.org/

[81] By collecting and analysing data from multiple sources or perspectives, triangulation allows researchers to overcome the limitations of individual methods and provides a more complete understanding of the

Thesis Outline

Chapter *One* begins by examining the historical evolution of transnational Shīʿīsm and emergent collective Shīʿī identity in the shrine cities of modern-day Iraq. It addresses the centrality of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Shīʿī Islam and its subsequent ritualisation in shrine cities. It then outlines the sociological evolution of transnational Shīʿīsm in Najaf and Karbalāʾ by investigating the inception of the *ḥawza* institution. It shows how innovations in neo-uṣūlīsm crucially elevated the position of the clerical class in the late 18th and early 19th century. It concludes by addressing the so-called "Shīʿa Crescent" and Iran's soft power strategy in the Middle East. *Chapter Two* details the theoretical framework used in this thesis. It outlines how two dimensions of power – temporal and spatial – construct shrines as pivots in world politics. The temporal dimension on Najaf focuses on the advocacy of Najaf's clerical authority in world politics by utilising Alshamary's theory of institutional responsibility. The spatial chapters on Karbalāʾ employ a form of perspectival realism to depict cartographic representations of collective identity, referred to as the 'ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage'. The following section builds on these spatial foundations by utilising Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus' to concentrate on the pietistic elements of the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'. Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity is depicted as a recursive cycle, inspired by and reproduced through spatial devices in and around Karbalāʾ and the poetic ritualisation of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

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research. See Uwe Flick, "Triangulation in Qualitative Research" in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, eds. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardoff and Ines Steinke (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2004), 178-184.

Chapter Three examines the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy between 1911 to 1920. It isolates and identifies this synoptic theme within confounding happenings including the outbreak of WWI, the 1918 Najaf uprisings, the British plebiscite, US President Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' speech, and the League of Nations' subsequent imposition of the 'Mandate' system in Iraq. It reveals the limits of self-determination and how Najaf's clerical authority pivoted world politics during this critical temporality. *Chapter Four* extends the inquiry to examine the paradox of clerical advocacy between 2003 and 2014. It begins by tracing how the clerical authority's early discourses on democracy resisted imperial impositions of order by promoting popular sovereignty as compatible with Islamic values, discouraging sectarian violence and vigilantism, and emphasising the centrality of the UN in the political process. It then explores how Sistānī's advocacy leading up to the 2005 elections had unintended consequences which enhanced the salience of sectarian identities in Iraq's political field and contributed to the institutionalisation of the elite informal consociational political bargain. It concludes by evaluating the impact of Sistānī's 2014 *jihād fatwā* to protect Iraq's holy sites.

Chapter Five illustrates how Karbalāʾs cultural landscape reproduces collective Shīʿī identity based on spots and spaces relevant to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. It first situates Karbalāʾs geo-cultural significance and discusses how its scared spaces construct the city as a focal point of transnational Shīʿī pilgrimage. It then anatomises the major and minor sacred spaces in Karbalāʾ which constitute the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage, highlighting how the entire city and its environs represent a broader locus of pilgrimage and collective identity. *Chapter Six* outlines how Karbalāʾ reproduces collective Shīʿī identity through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented textual cosmologies, rituals and objects. It examines how the Karbalāʾ martyrdom story functions as a master-narrative of collective identity, capable of inspiring what Fakhr-Rohani calls a 'Ḥusayni

Impetus'. It demonstrates how the 'Ḥusayni Impetus's sources reproduce collective identity at the individual and socio-institutional level. By portraying the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a universal and archetypal story for human salvation, it challenges existing understandings of the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'. The chapter concludes by presenting the core argument of Chapters' Five and Six – Karbalāʾs recursive cycle of collective identity reproduction.

Chapter One: The Historical Evolution of Shrine Cities and Transnational Shīʿīsm

This chapter contextualises the historical position of Shīʿī shrine cities as sites of transnational sacred authority and holy spaces which, as argued throughout this thesis, have the capacity to foster collective identity. To understand how Shīʿī shrines are constructed as pivots in world politics, it is first necessary to contextualise the transnational history of shrine cities from the late 18th to early 21st century. The first section introduces the centrality of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Shīʿī Islam and discusses its subsequent ritualisation in shrine cities. The second section traces the historical and sociological evolution of transnational Shīʿīsm in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ. It deals with the inception and history of the *ḥawza* (pl. *ḥawzāt*) institution, and the transnational rise of Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* in late 18th and early 19th century Middle East. The final section addresses the so-called "Shīʿa Crescent", and the Islamic Republic of Iran's soft power shrine strategy.

ʿĀshūrāʾ and the Emergence of Collective Shīʿī Identity

Muhammad was born around 570AD in Mecca, a city located near the Red Sea, which was a vital trading route that connected Persia, India, and the Mediterranean. Mecca was controlled by the powerful Quraysh tribe, who maintained political neutrality and benefited from trade with the Sasanians, Romans, and Abyssinians.[82] However, while the monotheistic empires surrounding Mecca followed a single deity, the Arabian Bedouins who lived in the area

[82] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 156.

practiced paganism. It is within this context that Muhammad, aged around 40 years old, received his first revelation.

At the outset of his preaching, Muhammad faced widespread opposition and ridicule from most of the Quraysh in Mecca. However, the city's economic and financial growth, combined with the resultant economic inequality, gradually weakened the traditional tribal solidarity, which had previously prevented intertribal strife. This environment of inequality made Muhammad's preaching attractive to the disenfranchised underclass, and he was able to form a new community of believers and emerged as their leader. Despite initial resistance, his influence grew, while facing increasing persecution from Meccan tribes. At the invitation of supporters in Medina, Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, an event known as the Hijra. This journey marked a pivotal moment in the early history of Islam, as Medina became the first Islamic city-state, providing a model for future Muslim societies.

The period between Muhammad's migration to Medina in 622 CE and his death is commonly referred to as the Medinan period. During this time, Muhammad established a robust Muslim community in Medina, founded on the principles of equality and protection of all citizens, regardless of their tribe or religion.[83] Through several military campaigns, Muhammad expanded the Islamic community (*umma*) and reinforced the fundamental teachings of Islam,

[83] This was formalised through the 622 Constitution of Medina. See Uri Rubin, "The 'Constitution of Medina': Some Notes" *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985): 5-23; Robert B. Serjeant, "The Constitution of Medina", *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964): 3-16; Saïd A. Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina: A Sociolegal Interpretation of Muhammad's Acts of Foundation of the "Umma"", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41:4 (2009): 555-575.

including the five pillars.[84] He implemented a range of social reforms, including the condemnation of exploitative practices and the abolition of female infanticide, which was prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia. Additionally, Muhammad introduced reforms regarding marriage, murder, theft, and adultery.

The Sunnī-Shīʿa divide emerged shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632AD. Abu Bakr and ʿAlī became key rivals over Muhammad's succession. Abu Bakr was one of the Prophet's closest and most trusted companions.[85] His daughter Aisha was also married to Muhammad, and he is considered the first man to accept Islam. ʿAlī was also very close to Muhammad. He was raised by Muhammad from a young age and married his daughter Fatimah. Shīʿī's contend ʿAlī was the first to accept Islam, although he was a minor at the time.[86] Abu Bakr ruled as the first caliph until his death in 634AD, until his successor Umar assumed leadership of the caliphate.

Umar died in 664 but did not appoint a successor. A council was convened which elected Uthman.[87] During Uthman's rule opposition arose due to his policies of distributing property to his appointees.[88] This opposition turned Kufa into a "bastion of proto-Shii pro-Alid

[84] The five pillars are the core practices of Islam: profession of faith (shahada), prayer (salat), charity (zakat), fasting (sawm), and pilgrimage (hajj).

[85] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 180.

[86] Hassan Abbas, *The Prophet's Heir: The Life of Ali Ibn Abi Talib* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

[87] Toby Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*: *The Making of Sunnism and Shiism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 19

[88] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 208.

sentiment".[89] The opposition, comprising of influential Quraysh tribespeople related to the Prophet, laid siege to Uthman's palace and killed him in 656. The group then pushed through elections which made ʿAlī leader of the caliphate and moved the capital to Kufa.[90] The Quraysh forces which installed ʿAlī then reneged their support and rebelled against him, losing a battle in 656.[91] The governor of Syria Muawiya emerged as Ali's most formidable challenger and demanded that ʿAlī hand over the murderers of Uthman. The two clashed at the 657 Battle of Siffin.[92] ʿAlī eventually agreed to mediate but was killed by the Kharijites in 661.[93] Muawiya then expanded his power and ruled as caliph from 661 to 680, institutionalising the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus.

Ali's first son Hasan became the second Shīʿī Imām. At first, he resisted acknowledging Muawiya's leadership but eventually retired to Medina and gave up his challenge. However, Hasan's younger brother Ḥusayn refused to pledge allegiance to Muawiya.[94] Hasan agreed to abdicate to Muawiya, on the condition that Muawiya handover the position of Caliph to Hasan.[95] However, Muawiya groomed his son Yazīd I to become caliph instead. This led to the

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[89] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 19

[90] Fanny Bessard, *Caliphs and Merchants: Cities and Economies of Power in the Near East (700-950)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 19.

[91] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 21.

[92] *Ibid*, 21.

[93] The Kharijites were the first sect to emerge in rebellious opposition to the Umayyad Caliphate. They attempted to assassinate Muawiya but failed. See Hannah-Lena Hagemann, *The Kharijites in Early Islamic Historical Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

[94] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 219.

[95] This peace treaty was ratified in 661. Jafri notes that the treaty stipulated that the caliphate: "would be restored to Hasan after the death of Muawiya, Hasan would receive five million dirhams annually from the

680 Battle of Karbalāʾ, where thousands of Umayyad soldiers defeated Imām al-Ḥusayn and his 70 odd followers because they refused to give allegiance (*bayʿa*) to Yazīd I.[96]

The battle of Karbalāʾ is considered one of the most consequential events in Shīʿī history, and ʿĀshūrāʾ is central to the development of a collective Shīʿī identity. The martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ is a central part of Shīʿīte ritual and signifies the willingness to resist illegitimate rule and fight injustice through sacrifice.[97] In Shīʿīsm, the significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ extends beyond the suffering of Imām al-Ḥusayn to encompass his entire family, with particular emphasis on Zaynab, his sister. Zaynab is also seen as a key figure of resistance and courage in Shīʿa Islam. She fought valiantly to save Ḥusayn's only son, Zayn al-Abidin. After the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ, she was taken to Damascus and held captive at the Umayyad court, where she is remembered for bravely confronting Yazīd and publicly accusing him of being "the enemy of Allah".[98] As a result, Zaynab is revered by the Shīʿīsm as the ideal embodiment of courage and piety.[99]

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state treasury and receive annual revenue from Darabjird [in Persia], and that peace would be guaranteed with one another. See Syed Mohammad Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (New York: Longman, 1979), 151.

[96] Describing this contested event in Islamic history, Fakhr-Rohani notes that Yazīd attached a short note to al-Walīd ibn Utba ibn Abu Sufyan which read: "Exert utmost pressure on al-Ḥusayn, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, and ʿAbd Allāh b al-Zubayr, without any respite until they yield an oath of allegiance". See Mohammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, *From Medina to Karbalāʾ: In the Words of Imām al Ḥusayn* (Birmingham: Sun Behind the Cloud Publications, 2013), 24.

[97] See Kamran Aghaie, "The Karbalāʾ Narrative: Shīʿī Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12:2 (2001): 151-176.

[98] Taef el-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661-1257* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 64.

[99] See Lara Deeb, "Emulating And/or Embodying the Ideal: The Gendering of Temporal Frameworks and Islamic Role Models in Shīʿī Lebanon", *American Ethnologist* 36:2 (April 2009): 43-64.

Another important event in Shīʿī history is Ghadir Khumm (632CE), in which Shīʿītes believe Muḥammad designated ʿAlī as his successor.[100] Ghadir Khumm and ʿĀshūrāʾ are foundational events in collective Shīʿī memory. The martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn is memorialised annually on ʿĀshūrāʾ – the climax of the Shīʿī month of mourning known as Muharram. Subsequent narrational lamentations on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ are central to Shīʿī memory, historiography, and to the reproduction of collective identity.

Unique practices and specific reverence to Imām al-Ḥusayn and his family naturally created an environment fertile to collective transnational identity.[101] This identity is perpetuated through pilgrimage known as *ziyārat*, and unique rituals and practices. As al-Adeeb writes:

> The events that took place in 680 AD Karbala thereby become the lens through which the present narrative is constructed and retold by rituals, narrations, murals, installations, music, and other creative practices. The believers thus live the past and the present simultaneously.[102]

For this reason, shrine cities such as Najaf and Karbalāʾ serve as venues for the expression of collective transnational Shīʿī identity through ʿĀshūrāʾ. A key aspect of transnational Shīʿīsm is the *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage, which involves visiting the shrines of Imām ʿAlī in Najaf and Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ.

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[100] Shīʿī Islam asserts that shortly before the Prophet Muḥammad's death he declared: "Of whomsoever I am Lord [mawla], then Ali is his Lord. Kamran S. Aghaie, "The Origins of the Sunnite-Shīʿīte Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition", *The Drama Review* 49:4 (2005): 42-47, 43; Ghadir Khumm is examined further in Chapter Six.

[101] For useful depictions of the Karbalāʾ Massacre in Shīʿī thought, see Ayatollah Ali Nazari Munfarid, *Imām Ḥusayn (AS) and Tragic Saga of Karbalāʾ* (Qom: Ansariyan Publications, 2001); Nazari Munfarid, *The Story of Karbalāʾ* (Qom: Ansariyan Publications, 2013).

[102] Dena al-Adeeb, "From Sacred Ritual to Installation Art: A Personal Testimony", *Journal of Comparative Poetics* 28 (2008): 7-40, 18.

The *Arbaʿeen* and ʿĀshūrāʾ: Transnational Pilgrimage and Practices

The *Arbaʿeen* is a pilgrimage between the shrines of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, also known as Marad al-Ras, which commemorates and laments the martyrdom of Imām Hussain and his family. It is the world's second largest annual social movement, taking place forty days after ʿĀshūrāʾ.[103] Muharram is a 40-day period of mourning observed by Shīʿīsm on the anniversary of the Battle of Karbalāʾ, with ʿĀshūrāʾ being the main focus and climax of the remembrance. Performative ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals during the *Arbaʿeen* include processions and *latm* (chest beating), as well as the controversial practice of *taṭbīr* (flagellation). *Taṭbīr* involves making an incision and then beating the skull with the hands or the pommel of a sword, sometimes to the point of bleeding. *Taṭbīr* is not practiced by all during the *Arbaʿeen* and is just one of the many rituals and practices associated with Shīʿī pilgrimage, many of them not mandatory.[104]

The earliest records of pilgrimage to the shrines in Karbalāʾ and Najaf date back to the 8th and 9th centuries.[105] During the presidency of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003), the *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage was banned for almost 30 years, but it experienced a resurgence after his fall. In 2021, despite concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic, over 16 million pilgrims travelled to Karbalāʾ for the *Arbaʿeen*. In the five years prior, the *Arbaʿeen* consistently attracted over 10

[103] Chinese Lunar New Year is the largest annual social movement.

[104] Chapters Five and Six provide a more detailed taxonomical depiction of modes of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented ritual. For a useful introduction to these rituals and practices, see Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ", *Die Welt des Islams* 33:2 (November 1993): 161-181.

[105] Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth Century Kufa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246.

million pilgrims.[106] In the five years prior, the *Arbaʿeen* consistently attracted over 10 million pilgrims.[107]

Some scholars argue that the qualitative importance of *ziyārat* is equally if not more significant than its quantitative qualities. Takim captures this qualitative significance by describing the liminal state where *ziyārat* allows a pilgrim to:

> enter a subjunctive, "what if" mode. The pilgrim is separated from the ordinary realm and, as he recalls the various historical anecdotes, Kerbala is brought alive in his mind and barrier between him and sacred event is broken. The pilgrim feels Ḥusayn's sorrow and contemplates what he would have done if he had been in Kerbala. The Ziyāra also challenges him to re-evaluate his contemporary life.[108]

Rituals along the *Arbaʿeen* involve deeply contemplative experiences filled with grief and reverence, where individual subjectivities contribute to the reproduction of a broader collective identity based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Usually differentiated by territory, class, and gender, the *Arbaʿeen* attracts millions of pilgrims from Iran, South Asia and the broader Shīʿī world.[109]

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[106] "Number of Pilgrims for Arbaeen 2021 Announced by Officials in Karbalāʾ", *Shafaqna* English, 28 September 2021, https://en.shafaqna.com/232464/statement-of-astan-quds-abbasi-about-statistics-of-arbaeen-pilgrimage-and-number-of-pilgrims-this-year/.

[107] *Ibid*.

[108] Liyakat Takim, "Charismatic Appeal or Communitas? Visitation to the Shrines of the Imāms", *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18:2 (2004): 106-120, 112; Moufahim and Lichrou offer an interesting account of how authenticity is evoked in a religious pilgrimage and the relationship between authenticity, rituals, and consumption. See Mona Moufahim and Mari Michrou, "Pilgrimage, Consumption and Rituals: Spiritual Authenticity in a Shia Muslim Pilgrimage", *Tourism Management* 70 (2019): 322-332; Morinis points about the difficulty of conceptualising pilgrimage in anthropology because it is "a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement towards ideals known but not achieved at home. As such pilgrimage is an image for the search for fulfillment of all people, inhabiting an imperfect world". See Alan Morinis, *Sacred Journey: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), xi.

[109] Fotini Chirstia, Elizabeth Dekeyser and Dean Knox, "To Karbalāʾ: Surveying Religious Shi'a from Iran and Iraq", *MIT Political Science Department Research Paper*, No. 2016-39 (October 2016), 1-178.

Because of the large number of Iranian pilgrims, many begin their journey in Basra. Figure 1 illustrates the main routes pilgrims take along the *Arbaʿeen*.

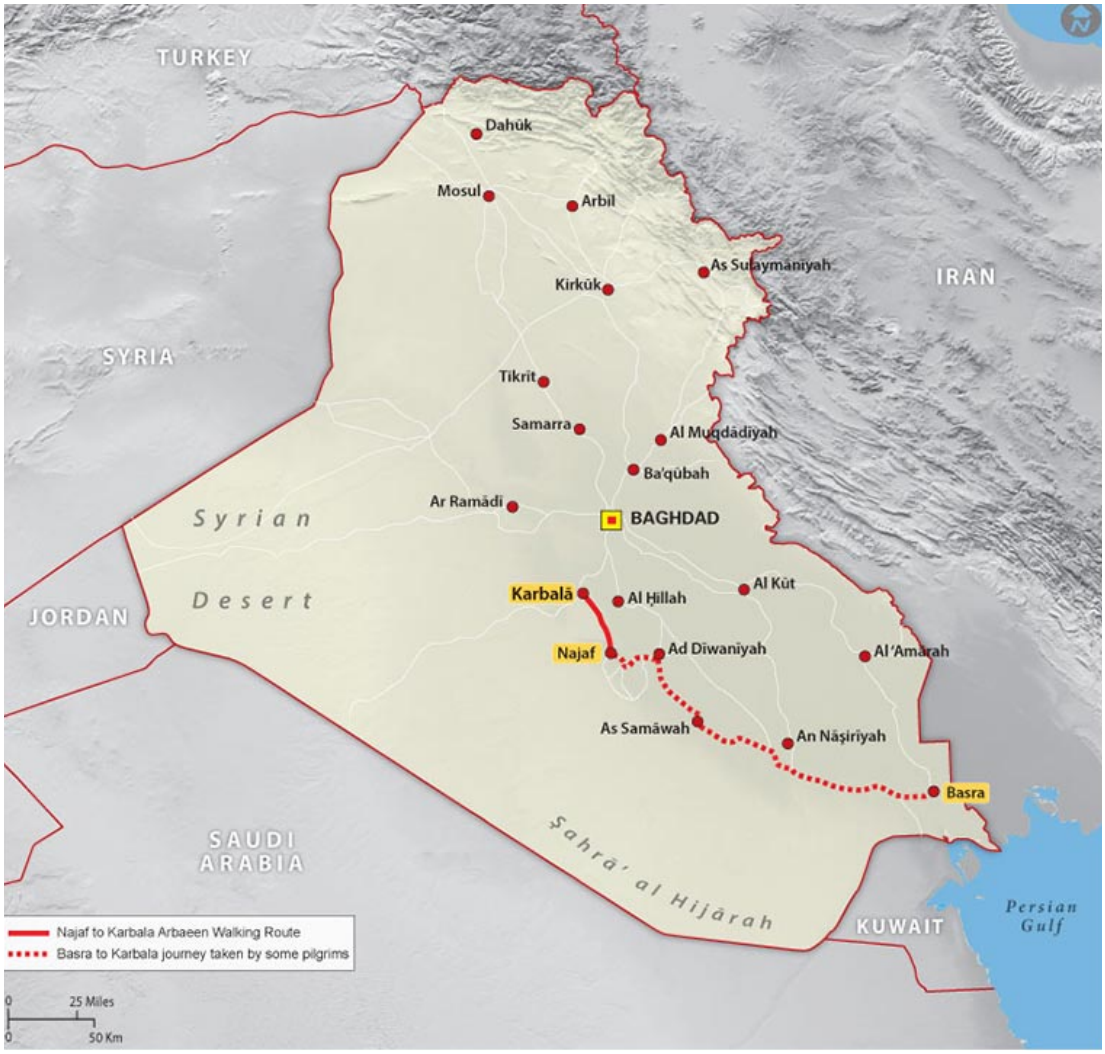

FIGURE 1 -"THE ROUTE OF ARBAEEN PILGRIMAGE", MAPS OF THE WORLD, 14 FEBRUARY 2019, HTTPS://WWW.MAPSOFWORLD.COM/ANSWERS/WORLD/WHAT-IS-THE-ARBAEEN-PILGRIMAGE/ATTACHMENT/ARBAEEN-PILGRIMAGE-ROUTE-MAP/#.

The Early Development of the *Ḥawzā* Shrine Cities as Communities of Learning

The core difference in the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide is political leadership, with the Sunnīs embracing the leadership an elected caliph.[110] According to Shīʿīte belief, after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, leadership of the community passed to the twelve Imāms. Shīʿīte ritual followed this tradition, starting with the first Imām, Alī b. Abī Tālib (d. 661 CE), until the disappearance of the twelfth Imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdī b. al-Ḥasan (d. 873 CE), which marked the beginning of the "minor occultation" (874–941 CE).[111] During this period, the absence of the Imām prompted four successive lieutenants to act as intermediaries between themselves and Shīʿī followers.[112] By housing the shrine of Imām ʿAlī, Najaf became one of the most important cities in Shīʿī history and scholarship.

Karbalāʾ did not have a religious educational system as developed as the one in Najaf. However, the shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn has a long history dating back to shortly after the Battle of Karbalāʾ. According to Azizi: "The first shrine to Hossein had been built of brick and plaster by Mukhtār, a revolutionary from Arabia who led a revolt shortly following Karbalāʾ".[113] The shrine was frequently targeted and destroyed first by Harun al-Rashid in

[110] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 11.

[111] The "Minor occultation" lasted between 874 – 941 CE. See A.A Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occulation of the Twelfth Imām: A Historical Background* (London: Muḥammadi Trust, 1986).

[112] For a more detailed examination of this period see Etlan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-shīʿī Views on Taqīyya", *Journal of American Oriental Society* 95:3 (1975): 395-402; Me'ir Mikha'el Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism* (London: Brill, 1999).

[113] Arash Azizi, *The Shadow Commander, Soleimani, The U.S., And Iran's Global Ambitions* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2020), 161.

787CE, then by again by the ʿAbbāsid caliph Mutawakkil (b. 822CE).[114] In contrast, Najaf has a rich history of Shīʿī scholarship and a well-established religious educational system.

Najaf Under the Buyids

The 10th and 11th centuries are commonly referred to as the 'Shīʿī century' because of patronage from the Faṭīmid (909-1171) and the Buyid (934-1062) dynasties. The Faṭīmids established the only Shīʿī caliphate to rule Cairo, which enabled the patronage of scholars.[115] The Buyids made Baghdad the centre of Shīʿīsm, developing the shrines of Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ, and the shrines of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and Imām al-Jawād in Kazimayn.[116] According to Matthesen, "Public celebrations under the Buyids and Faṭīmids signified a new Shii self-consciousness".[117] The Buyids also established Shi'i learning institutes which would eventually develop into the *ḥawza* institute.

The *ḥawza* in Najaf is widely considered to have been a centre of Shīʿī authority and learning for over a thousand years.[118] The term "ḥawza" has had various meanings in pre-modern Islamic history, initially referring to a physical building and later acquiring connotations of

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[114] *Ibid*; Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam,* 40.

[115] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 12.

[116] al-Kāẓim and al-Jawād were the seventh and nineth Shi'i Imāms.

[117] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 56; For more on the Faṭīmid empire, see Paul E. Walker, *Faṭīmid History and Ismaili Doctrine* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Paul E. Walker, *Caliph of Cairo: Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, 996-1021* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2009); Michael Brett, "The Realm of the Imām: The Faṭīmid in the Tenth Century", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 59:3 (1996): 431-449; Michael Brett, "The Diplomacy of Empire: Fatimids and Zirids, 990-1062", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 78:1 (2015): 149-159.

[118] Muḥammad Mahdī al-Āsafī, *Madrasat al-Najaf wa-tatawwur al-haraka al-islāhiyya fihā* (Najaf: Dār al-Nuʿman lil-Tibāʿa wa-al-Nashr, 1965), 4.

education, charity, and jurisprudence.[119] Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Tūsī (b. 995 CE), a prominent Shīʿī scholar in Baghdad, fled to Najaf in 1055 CE when the Seljuqs ousted the Buyids. Heern suggests that al-Tūsī was the first Shīʿī scholar to use the term *al-ḥawza al-Islamiyya* when discussing "the necessity of jihād".[120] The *ḥawza* institution is unique to Shīʿī Islam and was initially interchangeable with the Arabic term, *madrasa* (Islamic school). However, under Seljuq rule (1050-1300 CE), there are arguments that suggest madrasas adopted legalistic state functions and were used as a "coercive ideological state apparatus" to counter the spread of Ismailism promoted in Shīʿī seminaries.[121]

Heern critically examines the supposed "1000 year" history of Najaf's *ḥawza*, pointing out that the city was relatively quiet until the late 17th century.[122] Al-Ṭūsī's revitalised Shīʿī jurisprudence and law through his developments of the *Uṣūlī* school. He wrote some of the most important works in early Shīʿī Islam, including *Tahdhīb al-Ahkām* (The Refinement of the Laws in Terms of the Explanation of the Sufficiency), *Uddat al-Uṣūl* (Principles of Jurisprudence) and *Al-Istibsar* (The Perspicacious or The Book of Insight).[123] Although Najaf's

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[119] al-Sālihī defines the *ḥawza* as a centre of gravity in communal terms, while al-Bahādilī describes it as a "scholarly entity". See ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Sālihī, *al-Hawzāt al-ʿilmiyya fi al-aqtār al-Islāmiyya* (Beirut: Bayt al-ʿIlm lil-Nābihīn, 2004), 176; ʿAlī al-Bahādilī, *Muʿālam al-ḥawza al-ʿilmiyya fi al-Najaf* (Beirut: Dār al-Adwa, 1995), 21.

[120] However, the permissibility of clerics declaring *jihād fatwas*, was not established until after the consolidation of neo- Uṣūlīsm in the 18th century. See Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf", 418; Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAli al-Tūsī, *al-Nihāya fi mujarrad al-fiqh wa-al-fatāwā* (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-ye daneshgah, 1964), 290.

[121] See Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), xxiv.

[122] Heern, "One Thousand Years of Islamic Education in Najaf".

[123] Al Shakyk al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb ahkām* (The Refinement of the Laws (as Discussed) in Terms of the Explanation of the *Sufficiency*), n.p. n.d; Al Shakyk al-Ṭūsī, *Uddat al-Uṣūl* (Principles of Jurisprudence) n.p, n.d; Al Shakyk al-Ṭūsī, *'Al-Istaibsar* (Reflection Upon the Disputed Traditions or the Perspicacious or The Book of Insight) Digital Library India Item 2015.324122 (1889), https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.324122/page/n5/mode/2up.

ḥawza did not maintain its prominence after al-Ṭūsī's death in 1067CE, innovations in early *uṣūlīsm* laid the foundation for Shīʿī clerics to play an active role in everyday social and political life.[124]

Mongol Patronage of the Shrines

Various Mongol empires patronised Shīʿī shrines as they expanded westward. Ghazan Khan (b.1271) for instance, visited Najaf and Karbalāʾ in 1303. Some sources state Ghazan had a dream where the Prophet, Ali, Hasan and Ḥusayn visited him, prompting his visit to the shrines.[125] During his visit, Ghazan provided hostels for pilgrims and improved the canals.[126] Watson argues that tile production for shrines in Iran demonstrates that Mongol patronage of shrines extended across the Shīʿī world.[127] During the reign of the Timurid Empire (1370-1507) Shīʿī shrines were also patronised.[128] Matthiesen notes that Timur (b.1336) expressed allegiance to the *Ahl-al-Bayt* while also claiming descendance from both Genghis Khan and Ali.[129] He concludes that for Timur, "religious identity was more a tool than a driving force to

[124] Because an exhaustive history of Iraq's shrine cities since ʿĀshūrāʾ is not feasible, the historical period examined in this chapter focuses primarily on the period between the 18th and 21st century.

[125] Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

[126] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 87.

[127] Oliver Watson, "Pottery under the Mongols", in *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 325-245.

[128] Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 196.

[129] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 94; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Religiopolitical Legitimacy", in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Islam*, eds. Armando Salvatore, Roberto Tottoli and Babak Rahimi (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 353-375.

him".[130] This pattern of religious identity as a tool for political legitimation continued when the Safavids brought scholars from Jabal ʿĀmel to implement Shīʿī legalism in Persia.

Transnational Shīʿīsm in the Levant: The Rituals of Jabal ʿĀmel

ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and practices were controversial within the early Muslim world. They were also a point of concern to the state structures of local empires and external emissaries. Several scholars have traced the transnational history of ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals to Jabal ʿĀmel in southern Lebanon.[131] According to Abisaab, "By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Jabal ʿĀmil became the foremost center for Shīʿīte learning".[132] The clerical families of Jabal ʿĀmel played a central role in the spatial diffusion and spread of collective transnational Shīʿī identity.[133] However, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of ʿAmali scholarship in pre 20th century shrine cities due to ʿĀmili scholars' insistence on the regal status of Jabal ʿĀmel in Shīʿīte tradition and history. Shaery-Einsenlohr argues the self-association of ʿĀmili's and Shīʿī history is key to understanding political nationalism in Lebanon.[134] She writes that ʿAmili's,

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[130] Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 94.

[131] Sabrina Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite. Ulémas et lettrés du Jabal 'Âmil* (actuel LibanSud) de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à l'indépendance du Liban, Karthala-CERMOC-IFEAD, Paris, 2000, 246-247; Rula Abisaab, "Shīʿīte beginnings and scholastic tradition in Jabal ʿAmil in Lebanon", *The Muslim World* 89:1 (1999), 1-21; Philip Hitti, *Lebanon in History* (London: Macmillan, 1957).

[132] Abisaab, "Shīʿīte beginnings and scholastic tradition in Jabal ʿAmil in Lebanon", 15.

[133] For a thorough and accessible overview of the teachings and migrations of the *ʿulamā'* of Jabal ʿĀmel in Iran during the 16th – 18th century, see Rule Jurdi Abisaab, "The ʿulamā' of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501-1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change", *Iranian Studies* 27:1 (1994): 103-122.

[134] Roschanack Shaery-Einsenlohr, *Shiʿite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

> nationalize the social memory of a historical process – the sixteenth-century migration of Shiʿite ʿulamā' from Syrian Jabal ʿAmil to Safavid Persia – as evidence of their superior position in the wider Shiʿite tradition and history.[135]

ʿAmili historiographies were designed to confer legitimacy and socially elevate ʿAmili scholars above the Persian clerical class, which also claim introducing Shīʿīsm to Persia. While this claim is likely overstated, ʿAmili migration throughout the pre-modern Middle East was central to the development of Shīʿīte thought.[136] In fact, scholars from Jabal ʿĀmel were invited by Safavid leader Shah Tahmāsb (d.1576) to implement Shīʿī legalism.[137] The most influential Amili scholar was Abd al-'Ali Muhaqqiq al-Karaki who was given the title of "Seal of the mujtahids".[138] In return, Karaki bestowed the title of "just Imām" on Shah Tahmāsp.[139] While clerics of Jabal ʿĀmel were crucial in spreading Shīʿīsm in Safavid Iran, they also contributed to the transnational spread of Shīʿīsm elsewhere in the Middle East.

Shīʿīsm was vital for the Safavid's legitimation of its rule in Persia, but also contributed to the evolution of transnational Shīʿīsm through shrine cities. Mathieson argues that Iraq became more important as the Safavids legitimised themselves with Shīʿīsm.[140] This is because,

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[135] *Ibid*, 127.

[136] By the 17th century the majority of scholars in Najaf and Karbalāʾ were from Jabal ʿĀmel. See Muḥammad ʿAlī Kashmīrī, *Nujüm al-samā fi tarājim al'ulamā': sharh-e hal-e ʿulamā'' ye Shieh-ye qarnha-ye* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 2003); Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam*, 123.

[137] Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism*, 98.

[138] *Ibid*.

[139] *Ibid*; Ira M. Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 494-495; See also Roger Savory, "The Principal Offices of the Ṣafawid State During the Reign of Ṭahmāsp I (930–84/1524–76)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24:1 (1961): 65-86.

[140] Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imām*, 116.

"Safavid links to the shrines were emphasised, and patronage of the shrines of the Imām increased".[141] Shīʿī shrines benefited immensely from external patronage, not only from the Safavids but also from the Ottomans. The Ottomans contributed to renovations of the shrines in Kazimiyya, Najaf and Karbalāʾ, established fresh water supplies for the cities, and financed the shrines through endowment.[142] Describing this period, Mathieson writes:

> A process akin to the confessionalisation in Europe, thus played out across the central Islamic lands in the early modern period. That the sectarian aspect was a product rather than the cause of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry made it no less real to those affected by it.[143]

During and after the Safavid period (1502-1736CE), the Shīʿī clergy established economic independence and transnational religious authority outside state structures through the development of its *ḥawza* institution and various sources of patronage.[144] The Safavids encouraged this to strengthen their own religious claims. Through the diffusion of religious legitimacy between Karbalāʾ and Najaf, Iraq's shrine cities weakened the authority of the Ottoman's Millet system.[145] Discussing these cities, Litvak notes,

> The peculiar nature of the two communities as centers of learning independent of the state is best described by the Shīʿī term ḥawza ʿilmiyya (lit. territory of learning) or community of learning,

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[141] *Ibid*.

[142] *Ibid*, 116; Vefa Erginbas, "Problematizing Ottoman Sunnism: Appropriation of Islamic History and Ahl al-Baytism in Ottoman Literary and Historical Writing in the Sixteenth Century", *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60:5 (2017): 614-619.

[143] Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imām*, 134-135.

[144] For more on the *ʿulamāʾ* during the Safavid empire, see Ali Akhzari and Ali Akbar Kajbaf, "Structure and Social System of the Clergy in Safavid Era", *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 4:11 (March 2013): 216-223; Maryam Moazzen, *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shīʿī Higher Learning in Safavid Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Alessandro Cancian, "Past and Present in Shīʿīte Religious Schools", *Oasis* 29 (September 2019): 69-76; Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[145] The Ottomans tend to be regarded as having had a particularly decentralised order through the Millet system. The reality is that they oscillated between periods of centralisation and decentralisation.

> denoting a communal whole which encompasses scholarship, inter-personal and social bonds, as well as the organisational and financial spheres.[146]

Litvak's observation highlights the material and symbolic foundations of Najaf's sacred authority. Shrine cities were anomalous entities within the contested sovereign landscape of the Middle East, enabling religious leaders to influence politics and society. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Shrine cities also provided an environment where identity was privileged above ethnicity or social status. The social organisation of the shrine cities differed from that of pre-modern Persian society. The religious class or *ʿulamāʾ* in the *ḥawza* includes the head *marjaʿ* (source of emulation), usually a grand ayatollah. Rather than based on social or tribal status, the *ʿulamāʾ* consists mostly of voluntary pious men and those seeking social mobility.[147] The two key pillars of the *ḥawza* institution are patronage and scholarship.

The *marjaʿiyya* ("source of emulation pl.") refers to the supreme legal authority in Shīʿīsm. The *marjaʿiyya* occupy the highest level of the *ʿulamāʾ* hierarchy, above the mujtahid rank of Shīʿī Islam. Clerical Shīʿīsm gained economic independence through an informal direct worshipper-mujtahid tax payment system (*khums*). Fixed curriculum study was not established in shrine cities until the 19th century and students enjoyed broad freedoms in choosing teachers and classes.[148] Therefore, the early Shīʿī clerical establishment was informally structured, non-institutional, and non-bureaucratic, which naturally encouraged transboundary mobility because students were not confined to a single *ḥawza*, nor were they bound to one teacher

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[146] Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 2.

[147] *Ibid*.

[148] *Ibid*.

intellectually.[149] The transboundary rise of Najaf and Karbalāʾ within Ottoman Iraq increased the independence of the Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* as Iranian scholars could access wider audiences outside of Qajar Iran.

Constructing Society in Pre-Modern Shrine Cities: Scholarship and Patronage

Events such as the Afghan incursions in Iran (1722CE) and the fall of the Safavid Empire (1736CE), contributed to the transnationalism of Shīʿī shrine cities in Iraq. Likewise, the Persian plague (1773-74) in addition to Ottoman and Wahhābī attacks (1802-) on Shīʿī shrine cities altered regional demographics. Factors of insecurity for the Shīʿa contributed to the transnational mobility of its clerical class. One outcome was downward intragenerational mobility between merchant and clerical families.[150] This was particularly prevalent at the beginning of the 18th century when the *ʿulamāʾ* sought to deepen merchant ties to replace lost patronage from the Shah.[151]

At times, shrine cities were sites of heated theological debate within Islam and the development of transnational Shīʿa identity. The *Uṣūlī* tradition derives its title from *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). The tradition privileges the deductive reasoning of legal norms. Where social or legal issues arise, the science of Uṣūl, known as itjihād (independent reasoning), is used to fill gaps in the Qur'ānic tradition (Akhbār). In the Shīʿī tradition, the Uṣūlī *ʿulamāʾ* gained authority through their knowledge on theological matters and their ability to interpret the words

[149] Alshamary details the informal and non-bureaucratic nature of the Iraqi *ḥawza*, which is discussed in the following chapter. See Marsin Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests".

[150] Cole and Keddie, *Shiʿism and Social Protest*, 8.

[151] Juan R. I. Cole and Moojan Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shīʿīsm in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbalāʾ 1824-1843", *Past & Present* 112 (August 1986): 112-143, 133.

of the Imāms.[152] *Itjihād* (legal reasoning) was thus designed as a fluid effort to arrive at the "closest approximation to the objective truth until the return of the Imām".[153] The acceptance of *itjihād* granted significant socio-religious status to the clerical class in Shīʿī Islam.

Following the Afghan incursions in Iran (1722CE) and fall of the Safavid Empire (1736CE), many *ʿulamā'* from Iran migrated to Iraq and India.[154] With the dispersion of the *ʿulamā'* from Iran, the Uṣūlī tradition was challenged by the Aḵhbārī school which rejected the exercise of *itjihād*, arguing that the Uṣūlī *ʿulamā'* were usurping the functions of the hidden Imām.[155] Uṣūlīsm created greater space for clerics to provide socio-religious judgements for followers. By contrast, the Aḵhbārīyya school rejected the enhanced socio-religious role of clericalism advanced by Uṣūlīsm. Muḥammad Bāqir Behbahānī (b. 1706CE) is credited with consolidating the rise of Uṣūlīsm, and his story illustrates the transnational nature of Shīʿīsm in the 18th century. After the 1722 Afghan invasion of Isfahan, Behbahānī travelled to Iraq with his father where he studied the Ḥadīth with Sayyid Ṣadr al-Din al-Qummi, and his cousin Sayyid

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[152] Wilfred Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shīʿīsm in the Absence of the Imām", in *La notion d'authorite du Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, eds. George Makdisi et al. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982).

[153] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 12.

[154] Juan Cole, "'Indian Money' and the Shīʿī Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850", *Middle Eastern Studies* 22:4 (October 1986): 461-480; The Afghan incursions in Iran, known as the "Afghan Interlude" (1722-1730) began when the Hotaki-led Afghan Army besieged Isfahan in March 1722. The siege lasted eight months and is considered by historians to mark the beginning of the end of the Safavid dynasty. See John Foran, "The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty: Moving Beyond the Standard Views", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24:2 (1992): 281-304; Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces: Statecraft, Shiʿism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

[155] For a detailed discussion on the context of the *Aḵhbārīyya* and *Uṣūlī* schools in 18th century Iraq, See Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism* in *Iraq and Iraq*, 31-36; Juan Cole, "Shiʿi Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Aḵhbārī-Uṣūlī Conflict Reconsidered", *Iranian Studies* 18:1 (1985): 3-34; Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shiʿi Jurisprudence* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Reponses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabāʾi Burujirdi.[156] He later married Burujirdi's daughter, linking him to Shīʿī establishment in Iraq.[157]

Throughout the 1730s, Aḵhbārīsm was the dominant school in the shrine cities of Karbalāʾ and Najaf. However, under the leadership of Behbahānī, Aḵhbārīyya dispositions in Karbalāʾ and Najaf slowly shifted back to the Uṣūlī tradition. Litvak wrote that at one point in Karbalāʾ "Behbahānī began teaching Uṣūlī texts in secret due to the great Aḵhbārī hostility towards the Uṣūlis".[158] In addition to these secret teachings, Behbahānī had strong merchant contacts through his previous residences in Iran. He returned to Bihbhiban following Nadir Shah's 1732 invasion of Iraq's southern cities where he married the daughter of an influential merchant.[159] During this time, the *ʿulamā'* established strong foundations for economic independence and transnational clerical authority. Figure 2 lists some general differences between Uṣūlī and Aḵhbārī traditions.[160]

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[156] Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 14.

[157] Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism*, 167.

[158] Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 15.

[159] *Ibid*.

[160] Figure 2; For further details on the Uṣūlī and Aḵhbārī debate, see Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akbārī Shīʿī School* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's 'Munyat al-Mumārisīn'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55:1 (1992): 22-51.

	Uṣūlī	Akhbārī
Sources of Doctrine and Law	Accept four sources of authority in matters of doctrine and law: the Qur'ān, the Sunna, consensus (*Ijmāᶜ*) and the intellect (*ʿaql*). Divide the Traditions into four categories: *sahih, hasan, mutawātir* and *da'īf.* Doctrine or legal decisions derived from transmitted (*naqlī*) sources (i.e. the Qur'an and Traditions) cannot contradict what is derived from rational principles.	Accept four the first two and some of them only the second (since the Qur'an can only be understood with the help of the Traditions. Recognise only two categories: *sahih* and *da'īf.* What is derived from *naqlī* sources always has precedence over what is derived from the use of reason.
Position of the Faqīh (Jurist)	Divide men into two groups: mujtahid and *muqallid.* Unrestricted (i.e. fully competent) mujtahid is learned in all of the ordinances of the religion since the condition for issuing legal decisions is knowledge of a large number of sciences, the most important of which is *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence). Forbid following (*taqlīd*) a dead *marjaᶜ*. Obligatory to obey a mujtahid as much as it is to obey the Imām.	All men are *muqallid* to the Imām and it is not permissible to turn to a mujtahid. Only the Imām is informed of all the ordinances of the religion and that the only condition for issuing legal decisions is a knowledge of the terms used by the Imāms and knowing of a tradition confirming the matter. Allow use of the decisions of a dead jurist. Reject this.
Principles of Jurisprudence	Accept *itjihād.* Consider the use of *itjihād* will result in a (heavenly) reward even if the decision is incorrect.	Reject *itjihād.* Consider the issuing of a decree except on the basis of a reliable and explicit Tradition is blameworthy.

FIGURE 2 - "THE PRINCIPAL AREAS OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AKHBĀRĪ AND UṢŪLĪ TRADITIONS". SOURCE: ORIGINAL GRAPHIC. DATA DRAWN FROM MOOJAN MOMEN, *AN INTRODUCTION TO SHIʿI ISLAM: THE HISTORY AND DOCTRINES OF TWELVER SHIʿĪSM* (NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1987): 222-25.

In the 1760s, Behbahānī returned to Iraq and during this time, he worked to strengthen the Uṣūlīsm movement in its shrine cities.[161] This movement was supported by merchants, who provided financial support to Uṣūlī clerics in exchange for legal-religious support.[162] This

[161] In his efforts to consolidate uṣūlīsm in Iraq, Mathieson writes that Behbahānī "walked the streets with a gang of enforcers who would execute people professing to be Akhbaris". See Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imām*, 173.

[162] Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism*, 180.

alliance between the *ʿulamāʾ* and the merchant class ensured institutional autonomy without state-sponsorship. The shift from Aḵhbārī to Uṣūlī also necessitated the training of more mujtahids, expanding the *ḥawza* institution and the socio-legal status of mujtahids in Karbalāʾ and Najaf.[163] Behbahānī's efforts in consolidating neo-uṣūlīsm attracted many prominent Shīʿī scholars to migrate to Najaf and Karbalāʾ. Four important figures who contributed to the transnational sacred authority of Najaf in the 19th century were Jaʿfar Kashif al-Ghiṭāʾ (b. 1743), Jawad al ʿĀmili (b. 1747), Ḥasan al-Najafi (b. 1785), and Murtadā al-Anṣārī (b. 1781). Before discussing the evolution of Najaf's *ḥawza*, it is necessary to contextualise Karbalāʾs socio-political climate in the 19th century.

Pivots in the Sublime Gates: Imperial Patronage and Transnational Mobility

With its large Iranian ethnic composition, Karbalāʾ was viewed by Ottoman officials as a "potential fifth column".[164] Karbalāʾs demographics shifted further as a result of the Persian plague epidemic of 1773-74 and the 1802 Wahhābī Sack of Karbalāʾ.[165] The bubonic plague outbreak, which began in Baghdad and spread to Basra, resulted in the deaths of over 250,000 people in Basra alone and reached as far as Bombay India.[166] According to an Englishman who witnessed it in Basra:

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[163] Khalid Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shiʿite Identity", 850; Robert Gleave, "The Ijaza from Yūsuf al-Bahrānī (d.1186/1772 to Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Bahr al'Ulūm (d.1212/1797-8)", *Iran* 32 (1994): 115-123.

[164] *Ibid*, 115.

[165] The plague was estimated to have killed 250,000 people in Baghdad alone. See George C. Kohn, ed., *Encyclopedia of Plague and Pestilence: From Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 2001), 42-68.

[166] Abdolrazagh H. Shahraki, Elizabeth Carniel and Eshan Mostafavi, "Plague in Iran: Its History and Current Status", *Epidemiology and Health* 24:38 (2016): 1-13, 5.

> Neither is it in our power sufficiently to describe to you the horrid scene that we had hourly before our eyes and the dreadful accounts which we dayly received from Bussora… the inhabitants were carried off in such number that for several days very few could be found who were daring enough to pay their last duties to their departed friends and relations … the creek which runs through the town … was covered with clothes and beds of deceased persons, and numbers of basket with dead bodies were seen floating up and down in it undirected but by the wind and tie – the dead were probably the owners, and had been suddenly struck whilst they were earning their dayly substance

Several factors contributed to the severity of the plague including a lack of effective quarantine arrangements, washing of corpses in rivers, and transferring corpses to sacred shrine cities such as Mashhad, Qom, Najaf, and Karbalāʾ.[167] Plagues were one of several factors contributing to the transnational urban fabric of Karbalāʾ and shrine cities more generally. Following the outbreak of the plague, Behbahānī encouraged his students to leave Karbalāʾ. This ensured the survival of his transnational scholarly network and growth of Uṣūlīsm. By the time of his death in 1791, Uṣūlīsm was accepted throughout Iran and Iraq. The strong merchant ties and transnational scholarly networks cultivated by Behbahānī ensured the survival and growth of Uṣūlīsm. The political decentralisation within Iraq – and Karbalāʾ in particular – also contributed to the movement's success.[168]

Linguistically, Karbalāʾ is the only Arab city whose first language was Persian for several centuries, mainly because of the high number of Persian and Persian-speaking residents and pilgrims. Karbalāʾ gained autonomy through transnational patronage from successive Persian

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[167] *Ibid*, 2.

[168] Heern described southern Iraq during this period as "part of several world at once. It was oriented politically towards Baghdad and the Ottoman Empire; religiously, toward Iran; and economically, toward the Gulf. Simultaneously, southern Iraq was quite localized and semi-autonomous from each of these regions". See Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism*, 130-131.

empires and the Shīʿī kingdom of Awadh in India. This enabled Karbalāʾ to gain political and social autonomy from the highly centralised Ottoman Empire, fostering a unique form of collective identity. Under the auspices of the British East India Trading Company, Indian donations financed the creation of the Asafiyya and Hindiyya canals in 1775 and 1793.[169] These canals supplied water from the Euphrates to Najaf and increased migration to Karbalāʾ.[170] Throughout the late 18th and early 19th century, Karbalāʾ developed into a material metropolis of collective transnational Shīʿī identity. Another factor contributing to the transnational evolution of Iraq's shrine cities was the Oudh Bequest.

The ʿAtabāt and the Oudh Bequest

In addition to religious patronage, Karbalāʾs administrative autonomy was strengthened by financial support from the 'Oudh Bequest'. The Oudh Bequest was a charitable Islamic endowment established by the Indian Awadh state (1732-1859), for the holy Shīʿī shrine cities of Karbalāʾ and Najaf.[171] Litvak estimates that "Between 1850 and 1903, the Oudh Bequest channelled over six million rupees from India, through British mediation, to the Shīʿī shrine

[169] Ismail Safa Üstün, "The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shīʿī Challenge in Nineteenth-Century Iraq", in *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, eds. Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 87-105; Meir Litvak, "A Failed Manipulation: The British, the Oudh Bequest and the Shīʿī 'Ulamā' of Najaf and Karbalā'", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27:1 (May 2000): 69-89; For a primary source on the Hindayya canal, see Robert I. Money, "The Hindaya Barrage, Mesopotamia", *The Geographical Journal* 50:3 (September 1917): 217-222.

[170] Examining factors such as ethnicity, occupation and geographical factors, Litvak offers a useful socio-demographic study of the *ʿulamā'* of Najaf and Karbalāʾ. See Meir Litvak, "Continuity and Change in the ʿulamā' population of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, 1791-1904: A Socio-Demographic Study*", *Iranian Studies* 23:1 (1990): 31-60.

[171] See Meir Litvak, "Money, Religion and Politics: The Oudh Bequest in Najaf and Karbalāʾ', 1850-1903", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33:1 (January 2001): 1-21; Cole, "'Indian money' and the Shīʿī shrine cities of Iraq"; Üstün, "The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shīʿī Challenge in Nineteenth-Century Iraq", 89; See also Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the '*ulama'* Communities of Najaf and Karbala, 1797-1904", *Die Welt des Islam* 40 (March 2000): 41-61.

cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ in Iraq".[172] The Oudh Bequest enhanced the transnational expansion of Iraq's shrines in several ways. Facilities and water supplies were upgraded, transportation and communication links improved, facilitating an influx in pilgrims and closer ties between the shrines and the rest of the Shīʿī world.[173]

The British hoped that through the Oudh Bequest, they could "use them [Iraq's *ʿulamāʾ*] if necessary as a lever should Persia follow an unfriendly policy or show signs of contracting a fresh Russian loan".[174] Litvak describes the Oudh Bequest as a 'failed manipulation' because most senior clerics refused the money and those who accepted were "second-rank mujtahids whose standing and politics influence were limited".[175] Despite Britain's 'failed' attempts to influence Iraq's Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ*, the Oudh Bequest established strong ties between between Iraq's shrines, South Asians residing in the ʿAtabāt and Shīʿītes in Awadh.[176]

ʿAtabāt-e ʿāliyāt, (the Sublime Thresholds) refers to Najaf and Karbalāʾ as centre of learning, collective identity, and memory in the Shīʿī world. The broader term *ʿAtabāt* also encompasses the two other key shrines in Iraq: Kadhimiya and Sāmarrāʾ.[177] As assemblages, these shrines are significant to collective Shīʿī identity because they house six Shīʿī Imāms including Imām

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[172] Litvak, "A Failed Manipulation", 69.

[173] Litvak, "Money, Religion, and Politics"; Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 174.

[174] P/6652 GIFD-Internal Enclosure no.3 to Proceedings no.83 – Tehran Hardinge to Newmarch, 18 June 1903; Litvak, "A Failed Manipulation", 72.

[175] Litvak, "A Failed Manipulation", 87.

[176] Litvak notes that by 1867, "one third of the funds was allocated to a sperate 'Indian fund' to benefit poor Indian residents in Najaf and Karbalāʾ". See *Ibid*, 71.

[177] Üstün, "The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shīʿī Challenge in Nineteenth-Century Iraq".

Ḥusayn and Imām ʿAlī.[178] Successive Persian empires sought influence through the *ʿAtabāt*. Indian and Iranian donors implemented and funded several projects designed to develop and enhance pilgrimage routes to Karbalāʾ.[179] As its core component, Karbalāʾ was often subsumed within broader imperial strategies seeking influence through the ʿAtabāt.[180] However, while the shrines of Karbalāʾ and Najaf grew exponentially throughout the 18th century, their growth was not without contestation.

The Wahhābī Sack of Karbalāʾ

In 1802, the Wahhābī movement originating in Najd, raided and sacked Karbalāʾ. This was a devastating attack, which served in crystallising themes of victimhood and grievance in discourses relating to Shīʿī identity.[181] Inspired by the rhetoric of Muḥammad Ibn al-Wahhāb (b. 1703), the Wahhābī movement followed a puritan version of Sunnī Islam which considered Shīʿī veneration of Imāms and shrines as tantamount to polytheism. During the sack of Karbalāʾ, between 5,000 to 25,000 people were massacred and the shrines of Ḥusayn and

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[178] The four other Shīʿī Imāms buried in Kazimayn and Sāmarrāʾ are Mūsā al-Kazim, Muḥammad al-Jawād, ʻAli al-Naqi, and Ḥasan al-ʻAksari.

[179] Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars of the Nineteenth Century Iraq*.

[180] For an authoritative treatment of Karbalāʾs geo-cultural context during this period, see Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shiʿite Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

[181] Several primary sources document the devastating nature of the Wahhābī sack of Karbalāʾ. See Louis Alexandre Olivier de Corancez, *L'histoire des Wahabis: depuis leur origine jusqu'à la fin de 1809* (The history of the Wahabis: from their origin until the end of 1809) (Reading: Garnet, 1995), 27; Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouin and Wahabys: Collected During His Travels in the East* vol 2 (Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1995), 186; Felix Mengin, *Histoire de l'Egypte Sous Les Gouvernement de Mohammad-Aly: Ou, Récit Des Événemens Politiques Et Militaires Qui Ont Eu Lieu Depuis Le Départ Des Français Jusqu'en 1823* (History of Egypt Under the Government of Mohammad-Aly: Account Of The Political And Military Events Which Occurred From The Departure Of The French Until 1823) vol 2 (Paris: Bertrand, 1823); Harry Philby, *Saudi Arabia* (London: Benn Limited, 1955); Jean Rapport de Raymond, Mémoire sur l'origine des *Wahabys* (The Wahhābīs Seen through European Eyes 1772-1830), (Cairo: de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale pour la Société Royale de Géographie d'Égypte, 1925), 16.

ʿAbbas were desecrated.[182] According to Rousseau, the Wahhābīs had long intended to loot the shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn because it had received donations of gold, silver, and rare jewels. Describing the event, he wrote,

> That day came at last…12,000 Wahhābīs suddenly attacked the mosque of Imām Ḥusayn; after seizing more spoils than they had ever seized after their greatest victories, they put everything to fire and sword…The elderly, women, and children—everybody died by the barbarians' sword. Besides, it is said that whenever they saw a pregnant woman, they disembowelled her and left the foetus on the mother's bleeding corpse. Their cruelty could not be satisfied, they did not cease their murders and blood flowed like water. As a result of the bloody catastrophe, more than 4000 people perished. The Wahhābīs carried off their plunder on the backs of 4000 camels. After the plunder and murders they destroyed the Imām's shrine and converted it into a trench of abomination and blood.[183]

The sacking of Karbalāʾ devastated the city's urban fabric caused political upheaval at the macro level and ontological insecurity at the micro level.[184] Büyük Sülayman Pasha was criticised by the Shah of Persia, Fath Ali Shah for not confronting the Wahhābīs.[185] Pasha was

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[182] Jean Baptiste Rousseau, *Description du Pachalik du Baghdad Suivie d'une Notice Historique sur les Wahabis* (Paris, Nabu Press, 1809); Another contemporary source from the Wahhābī perspective boasts of destroying the dome above Ḥusayn's grave and killing close to 2000 people in less than a day. See Uthman b. Abd Allah b. Bishr, *Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd* [The glorious history of Nejd] (Mecca, 1930): 121-122; It is important to note that Saudi sources hold a different interpretation of what caused this event. They argue that Shīʿī pilgrims attacked and robbed a Najdī caravan returning to the Arabian Peninsula. Ismail notes: "In 1800, two hundred people from Najd traveling through to Kūfa to visit the shrine of ʿAlī Ibn Abī Ṭālib. The Shīʿa pilgrims and the Najdī travellers engaged in a heated debate, resulting in the pilgrims slaughtering forty to fifty Najdīs. See Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 178; Ibrahim al-Haṭlānī, *Al-Shīʿa al-Suʿūdiyyah: Qirā'ah Tārīkhiyyah wa Siyāsīyyah* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes, 2009), 94.

[183] Rousseau, *Description*, 74-75.

[184] The literature on ontological security is extensive. Its use here refers simply to Gidden's notion of ontological security as a "person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety". See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 38-39. For theological othering, see Naser Ghobadzdeh and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Sectarianism and the Prevalence of 'Othering' in Islamic Thought", *Third World Quarterly* 36:4 (2015): 691-704.

[185] Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 96-98.

subsequently dismissed by the Ottoman sultan for the event. At the local level, Nakash noted the attack exposed the lack of a Shīʿīte army to prevent future attacks and contributed to the strengthening of a "sectarian identity" among Shīʿī *ʿulamā'*.[186] It also encouraged the *ʿulamā*'s resolve to convert regional tribes to Shīʿīsm.[187] These sentiments were compounded by further Wahhābī raids of Najaf in 1806 and 1810. In 1810, they seized the city, destroying the tomb of Imām Alī and looting the shrines treasures.[188] The shrines received military support from Qajar Shah Fatḥ ʿAlī Shah, who sent 300 Baluch soldiers to guard the shrine in Karbalāʾ.[189] The departure of Behbahānī's clerical pedigree and the demographic changes brought about by the 1773 plague, coupled with the threat from the Wahhābīs in the 18th century, contributed to the development of a distinct urban fabric in Karbalāʾ. This period of regional insecurity fostered a fertile environment for mafia-like urban groups to emerge in Karbalāʾ.

Cole and Momen describe Karbalāʾ during the early 19th century as an unusual city-state with a parallel "mafia"-like government made up of coalition forces.[190] Urban defence forces in the city drew support from three main groups: Shīʿī Arab nomads, artisans, shopkeeper merchants, and the local *ʿulamā'*.[191] The social fabric and distinct transnational identity of the town made it a virtually self-sufficient, autonomous city-state. The power brokers in Karbalāʾ held varying discontents with the social and political realities of Ottoman administration, but they were united in their adherence to Shīʿī doctrine, creating a transnational challenge to the centralised

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[186] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 28.

[187] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 131.

[188] Matthesen, *The Imām and the Caliph*, 170.

[189] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 131.

[190] Cole and Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shīʿīsm in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbalāʾ 1824-1843".

[191] *Ibid*, 112.

Ottoman state system. The expansion of pilgrimage, trade, and religious endowments enhanced Karbalāʾs institutional and economic autonomy. At the same time, imperial rivalries between British, Ottoman and Qajar spheres of influence further increased the city's process of transnationalisation.

Karbalāʾ gained full autonomy between 1820 and 1830 with the emergence of Sayyid ʿAbduʿl Wahhab as the city's esteemed local governor.[192] With support from Iran and gifts from British India, Karbalāʾ became a practically autonomous city free to express collective religious identity with pride. ʿĀshūrāʾ commemorations such as *taʿzīyah* (Shīʿī passion play) were performed throughout the city without restrictions. However, the socio-economic makeup of the city, comprising mostly of labourers, semi-skilled tradesmen and shopkeepers, made the city susceptible to the emergence of urban defence forces and "mafia"-like organisations. During this period, Cole and Momen write "The sons of petty shopkeepers and minor clergy began to rival the old landed Sayyid families in wealth and influence by virtue of their command of armed force".[193] Local elites had gained relative power in Karbalāʾ between the 1820s and 1830s, changing the social structure of the city.[194] Karbalāʾs urban "mafia" split into an Iranian faction led by Mirza Salih and an Arab faction led by Sayyid Ibrahim Zaʿfarani.[195] Crucially, both leaders were of paternal Iranian heritage and relied on collective transnational

[192] Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office 195/204, "Translation of a Persian Account of Karbalāʾ", Spring 1843.

[193] Cole and Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shīʿīsm in Iraq", 119.

[194] *Ibid*, 113-143.

[195] *Ibid*.

Shīʿī identity.[196] Mirza Salih solidified the transnationalism of his movement by bringing between 60-150 Baluch soldiers from Fars in Iran.[197]

During this time, the Shīʿīte authority in Karbalāʾ firmly believed that the In-Occultation Imām, Imām al-Mahdī, was the only just ruler. Attempts by urban defence organisations and the Ottoman administration to exercise authority were viewed as illegitimate.[198] However, the *ʿulamā'* held a vested interest in retaining institutional autonomy of shrine visitation and trade. For this reason, elements of the *ʿulamā'* maintained links with cities and gangs in Iran. By this point, the network of city autonomy threatened the Ottoman's centralised system of governance. In September 1842, Baghdad's new Ottoman viceroy, Muḥammad Najib Pasha, brought a staunchly conservative and chauvinistic approach. Just over a month later, Pasha sought to visit Karbalāʾ under the guise of overseeing repairs to the Hindiyyah canals supported by India.[199] In 1842, Najib Pasha noted that the ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals, such as *taʿzīyah* commemorations, were practiced openly in the streets of Karbalāʾ. The ritual was previously practiced in secret.[200] Nejib Pasha viewed Persian migration and investment in Karbalāʾ as "a

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[196] For the Persian-Ottoman rivalry over Iraq, see S. H. Longreigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925).

[197] Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office, 195/204, "Translation of a Persian Account; FO. 248/108 Lt.-Col Farrant to Sir Stratford Canning, dated Baghdad, 15 May 1843.

[198] Said Amir Arjomand, "The Shīʿīte Hierocracy and the State in pre–Modern Iran: 1785-1890", *Archives européenes de sociologie, xx* (1981): 40-78.

[199] Public Record Office, London, Foreign Office 248/108, Najib Pasha to political agent in Turkish Arabia, (Autumn 1842); In a broader study of 18th century Ottoman encounters with the Shīʿī communities in Iraq, Çestinsaya argues "The ʿAtabāt became a centre for the *Uṣūlī* school of Shiite jurisprudence, which argued for a political role for the ʿulamā'; the ʿAtabāt retained their primary as a centre of religious authority throughout the nineteenth century". See Gökhan Çestinsaya, "The Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community of Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century", *Middle Eastern Studies* 41:4 (July 2005): 561-574, 561.

[200] Litvak, "Encounters between Shiʿi and Sunni ʿulamā'' in Ottoman Iraq", in *The Sunna and Shi'a in History*, 69-86, 80.

moral invasion by Iranians".[201] This threat perception was justified upon the basis that Karbalāʾ's population ranged from 15,000-20,000, however including the number of Iranian visitors it ranged from 60,000 to 70,000.[202] As a result, less than a year later, fearing Karbalāʾs growing autonomy rising Shīʿī population, the Ottomans invaded Karbalāʾ, killing around half its population.[203]

Cole and Momen draw on Hobsbawm and Hess' typology of the Sicilian mafia, persuasively arguing that Karbalāʾs autonomy was similar. They write,

> First, they come into power in a frontier situation of weak state authority – in rural, remote areas like the island of Sicily. Karbalāʾ fits this suggestion as a Shiite, partly Iranian, enclave. Both Sicily and southern Iraq had for centuries been colonially ruled by distant and shifting centres, so that neither area did the people invest the formal government with much legitimacy.[204]

In various studies of rebels, Hobsbawm developed the notion of a 'collective attitude' existing in forms of social movements in the 19th and 20th centuries.[205] Hobsbawm explored the closely associated concept of the Robin Hood-like "social bandit" as a symptom of peasant–ruling class socio-political dynamics.[206] In such a scenario, a particular social fabric emerges in the

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[201] Başbakanlik Osmanli Arşivi, Mesail-I Mühimme, no. 1831-1840 (Kerbela: Meselesine Dair)

[202] *Ibid*.

[203] Cole and Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shiism in Iraq", 133; Citing letters Gertrude Bell sent to her father, Kadhim estimates 20,000 Karbalā residents were killed. See Abbas Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq: The 1920 Revolution and the Formation of the Modern State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 4.

[204] *Ibid*, 118; Henner Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi: Origin, Power and Myth* (New York: New York University, 1996); Eric Hobsbawn, *Bandits* (New York: Delatorre Press, 1969).

[205] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959); Hobsbawm, *Bandits*; Eric Hobsbawm, *The New Century: In Conversation with Antonio Polito* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

[206] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*.

form of a cooperative association between the peasant stratum and bandits against an oppressive ruling class. Importantly, this scenario squares well with Shīʿīsm's emphasis on resistance against oppression and injustice. Cole and Momen's novel depiction of Karbalāʾ captures the emergence of a distinct local urban identity, with its various entanglements with regional empires. This unique socio-political "collective attitude" in 18th and 19th century Karbalāʾ is crucial to understanding the *ʿulamā*'s transnationalism and the context under which Najaf emerged as the preeminent centre of Shīʿī education and jurisprudence.

Transnational *ʿUlamā'* Agency from Karbalāʾ to Najaf

Throughout the 19th century, Najaf distinguished itself from Karbalāʾ as the centre of global Shīʿī learning. Litvak observed that "The 1840s marked the shift from Karbalāʾ' to Najaf as the major centre of learning for Iranians, and consequently a centre for universal Shia leadership".[207] Shrine salience in the 19th century was a product of reputation regarding ḥawza and the *marjaʿiyya*, and spatial proximity to important burial sites. The head *marjaʿs* success was based on a balance of scholarly excellence and ability to foster patronage networks and alliances. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafi (b. 1785) was a key scholar who Litvak argues contributed to "a qualitative change in the nature of religious leadership in the shrine cities and the entire Shīʿī world".[208] Most notable of al-Najafi's consolidation of the *ḥawza* in Iraq was his Iranian heritage, transnationalising the *marjaʿiyya* in Iraq. Najafi leadership transposed "almost half a century of hegemony by the Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ family and of Arab *ʿulamā*'".[209]

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[207] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 62.

[208] *Ibid*, 64.

[209] *Ibid*, 70; The al-Ghiṭāʾ family were central to clerical Shīʿīsm in 19th century Arabia. See Ḥasan Ali Turki Abbas, "Imām Kashif al-Ghiṭā, the Reformist Marji' in the Shi'ah School of Najaf", (PhD diss., The

It is important to note that Jaʿfar Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ played a key role in the development of collective transnational Shīʿī identity by permitting corpse transportation and burial at shrine cities by *fatwā* in 1812.[210] This was significant because corpse revenue proved a core component of the clerical authority's revenue stream. 3,176 corpses were transformed from Iran in 1849-1950.[211] This number rose from 9,620 in 1889 to 14,354 the following year.[212] Burial taxes subsidised local hospitals and was used to alleviate homelessness in Najaf and Karbalāʾ.[213] The economy of corpse burial itself was profitable for various sectors of local communities. It compensated sellers, gravediggers, people performing ritual body cleansing, body carriers, as well as cemetery administrators.[214] The corpse economy therefore became a key source of income for Iraq's *ʿulamā'*. Describing the support of the corpse economy, a poem inscribed by Iraqi poet Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi read: "The yields of my homeland are scholars, And the incomes of my homeland are funerals".[215] For his part, Jawad Al-ʿAmili (b. 1751) continued a century lineage of Lebanese Shīʿī scholars migrating to Iraq, studying under

University of Arizona, 1997); Javad Varee, "The Characteristics of the Jurisprudential Attitude of Kashif Al-Ghiṭā", *Studies of Islamic Jurisprudence and Basis of Law* 13:39 (2019): 67-94.

[210] Üstün unpacks the corpse issue and various other frictions between Ottoman governance and the rise of the Shīʿī ʿulamā' in 19th century Iraq. See Üstün, "The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shīʿī Challenge in Nineteenth Century Iraq", 87-102; Mirza Muḥammad Tunakabuni, *Qisas al-ʿulamā'* (Tehran: n.d.), 198.

[211] Muhammad Reza Nasirî, *Nasireddin Şah Zamaninda Osmanli-Iran Münasebetleri (1848-1890)* (Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University Foreign Studies, Tokyo, 1991), 156.

[212] John Lorimer, *Dalil al-Khaliij* (*al Qism al-Ta'rikihi),* (Doha: Matabiʿ 'Ali bin 'Abi, 1975), 3383.

[213] Üstün, The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shīʿī Challenge in Nineteenth Century Iraq", 93.

[214] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 191.

[215] *Mawsuʿat al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ed. Jaʿfar Dujayli (Beirut: Dar Al-Adwa', 1993), 507.

Behbahānī in Karbalāʾ then, in Najaf, under al-ʿUlūm.[216] Along with Al-Ghiṭāʾ, he also played a significant role defending Najaf against the Wahhābī attacks in 1802.[217]

Al-Najafi fostered methodical patronage networks across the Middle East, creating a basis for his leadership. Patronage comprised mostly of former students and followers, mainly merchants at the time. Throughout the 19th century, the theological development of Shīʿīsm was constructed through the ʿulamā' and their travels between the shrine cities in Iran and Iraq. Identifying the importance of continuity in the *marjaʿiyya*, al-Najafi designated Murtada al-Anṣārī (b. 1781) as the supreme exemplar to succeed him. Anṣārī would become a pioneer of Shīʿī theological jurisprudence, innovating existing socio-legal frameworks.[218]

Murtada al-Anṣārī and the Ascendency of Uṣūlīsm

Anṣārī was prolific in his writings on *fiqh* and *uṣūl*, becoming the leading Shīʿī mujtahid. It was rare for Shīʿī scholars to masters both fields and thus Anṣārī was credited with major developments in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Principles of Islamic jurisprudence). Anṣārī redefined key frameworks of Shīʿī jurisprudence and theology. Cole notes that supporters referred to Anṣārī as "the Imām's Chosen One and the Caliph in truth over all men in judgements concerning what is permitted or forbidden, the Exemplar of both the experts and the laymen".[219] Such was

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[216] Devin J. Stewart, "An Episode in the 'Amili Migration to Safavid Iran: Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Samad al-'Amili's Travel Account", *Iranian Studies* 39:4 (December 2009): 481-508.

[217] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 122; Meir Litvak, *Know Thy Enemy: Evolving Attitudes Towards "Others" in Modern Shiʿi Thought and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 153.

[218] For a useful account of Ansari's thought and leadership, see Zackery M. Heern, *Shiʿi Law and Leadership: The Influence of Mortaza Ansari* (Saarbrucken: Lambert, 2010).

[219] Juan Cole, "Imāmi Jurisprudence and the Role of the ʿulamā'", in *Religion and Politics in Iran*, ed. Nikki Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 33-46, 42.

Anṣārī's status that he was considered by many to be the first *marjaʿ taqlīd* (source of emulation).[220] Anṣārī proposed a new methodology which was divided between two branches: *lafzi* and *ʿamali*. The former refers to the semantical branch of theology concerning the rules of reasoning regarding the Qurʿan and traditions. The latter refers to the procedural field, of which Anṣārī's main contribution was made.[221]

Anṣārī codified clearly structured procedural principals (*al-uṣūl al-ʿamaliyya*) in his treatise: *Faraʿid alʿuṣūl*.[222] Anṣārī set out three categories for deducing legal rulings through norms and procedural principals. The first category focuses on legal norms of certainty (*qat*), instances of direct textual sources where reason (*ijtihad*) is not required. The second category focuses on the determination of norms through "valid conjecture" (*zann mu'tabar*), where ijtihad is employed to create legal norms. The third category focused on doubt (*shakk*) and was where Anṣārī's greatest contribution was made. Where guidance could not be found in written sources or through probable reasoning, Anṣārī "formulated four guiding and interrelated procedural principles which are organized dialectically".[223] The three categories Anṣārī codified in Shīʿī scholarship extended the *ʿulamā'*s theological jurisdiction to broader aspects of social life. Anṣārī was tremendously popular with some sources claiming that he received *khums* and *zakāt* payments from around 40 million people.[224] Through charismatic leadership and diffuse

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[220] Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 211.

[221] Ahmad Kazemi-Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shīʿīte Islam* (Kuala Lumpar: ISTAC, 1996).

[222] Muradha al-Ansari al-Tostari, *Fara'id ul-Uṣūl* (Fundamentals of Jurisprudence) n.d., available at http://alhassanain.org/m/arabic/?com=book&id=604,

[223] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 72.

[224] Muḥammad ʻAlī Mudarris Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab: fī tarājim al-maʻrūfīn bi-al-kunyah aw al-laqab, yā, Kunan wa-alqāb* (Tabriz: Chāpkhānah-'i Shafaq, 1970); Abdullah described Ansari as "one of the wealthiest and powerful men in Iraq". See Thabit A.J. Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 181.

economic structures, the *ḥawza* institution enabled shrine cities to affect social and political dynamics in the Middle East.[225] From these depictions it is clear the hierarchy of religious authority underpinning the *marjaʿiyya* creates a coherent model of religious legitimacy beyond state structures.

The Socio-Spatiality of the *Marjaʿiyya*

The shrine cities of Karbalāʾ, Najaf and, to a lesser extent, Sāmarrāʾ, were key centres of Shīʿī learning throughout the 19th century. The cities' *ḥawzāt* gained salience commensurate to the popularity and prestige of their associated *marjaʿ*. Shrine cities' salience oscillated based on the preferences of notable *marjaʿ*, often influenced by the social and political conditions of time. These factors played a large role in determining where Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* in Iraq chose residence, enhancing the transnational nature of Shīʿīsm.

The 19th century can be viewed as a period of prolific growth for Shīʿī shrine cities. As the *ʿulamā'* consolidated the adoption of uṣūlīsm, informal rituals became institutionalised, and the Ottoman institutionalised shrine visitation through regulation and taxation.[226] Prominent clerics attracted large numbers of students from a variety of regions and ethnic groups, enabling the transnational process through pilgrimage and the dispersion of ideas. This created the exponential growth of the students, which in turn spurred the economic growth of the shrine city. Certain shrine cities of major importance to Shīʿīsm were at a natural advantage in

[225] Alshamary provides a comprehensive account of how the *Uṣūlī* tradition "paved the way for modern concepts for clerical authority to emerge such as marjaʿiiyat al-taqlīd (the emulation of the most learned scholars") and Khomeini's version of Wilayat al-Faqih". See Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 64-65.

[226] Matthesen, *The Imām and the Caliph*, 171.

attracting pilgrims and students, but this was balanced by the reputation of the head *marjaʿ*. Figure 3 illustrates the birthplace and birth year of notable Shīʿī clerics in the late 18th and early 19th century, in geographic comparison to Muḥammad ibn al-Wahhab.[227]

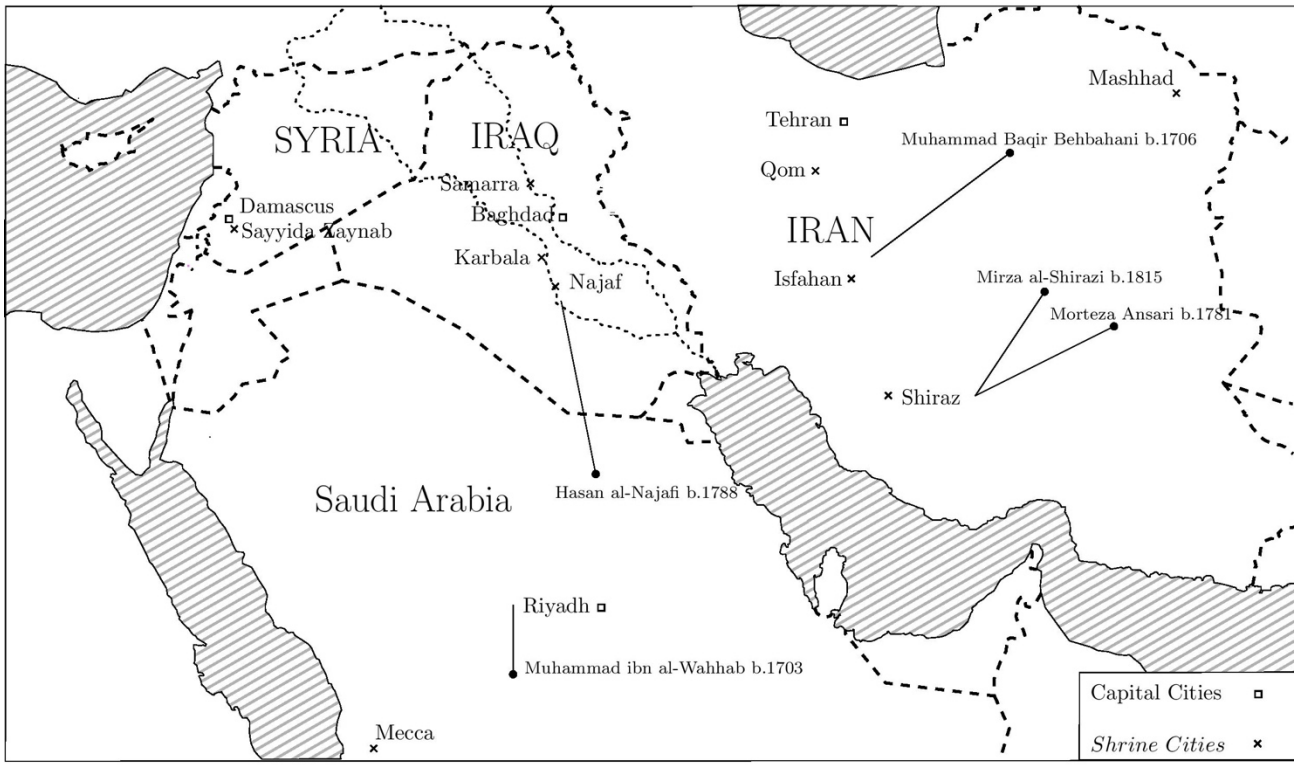

FIGURE 3 ISLAMIC FIGURES OF THE LATE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURY (ORIGINAL SOURCE).

Pivots in the Political Triangle

The Ottomans were generally pragmatic in their approach to the rise of Shīʿī shrine cities under its principalities. As Karbalāʾ and Najaf emerged as global destinations for Shīʿī pilgrims and scholars, the Ottomans implemented robust tax systems on the shrine cities. Litvak considered

[227] Figure 4.

the interplay between the *ʿulamā'* of Iraq, the Ottomans and the Qajars, a "political triangle".[228] In this way, shrine cities affected the axes of international order. Both the Ottoman and Qajar empires were eager to keep the *ʿulamā'* in their good graces. Alignment with the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* was as much a matter of social legitimacy as it was a matter of economic interest. Shrines not only attracted pilgrims and students, but also played a lucrative role through corpse traffic. According to some estimates by the mid 18th century, Najaf alone attracted over 20,000 bodies for burial annually.[229]

Both the Ottoman and Qatar empires were at pain not to fuel sectarian tensions.[230] However, at the local level, Litvak noted that "sectarian animosities between Sunnīs and Shīʿas aggravated the frictions between the government and the ʿulamā'".[231] In one anecdotal case, the local Ottoman governor in Najaf "took pleasure in causing the Sheah Persians to 'eat dirt' at the hands of the infidels".[232] Shrine cities played host to several sectarian pressures driving the Sunnī-Shīʿī rivalry, further crystallising collective Shīʿī identity. The mass conversion of Iraqi tribes to Shīʿīsm during the 19th century was a point of concern for the Ottomans and Sunnī clerics. Despite this, the *ʿulamā'*s elevated social position in the shrine cities enabled them to hedge political positions and play great powers off against one another, accepting Ottoman overtures while maintaining positive links to the British and Persian empires.

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[228] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 165.

[229] Great Britain, Administration Reports of the Sahmiyya Division, 1918, Najaf, CO 696/2; Annual Administration Report on the Iraq Health Services for the year 1921, CO 696/4.

[230] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*, 165.

[231] *Ibid*, 166.

[232] *Ibid:* FO 195/1935 Baghdad no. 340/57, Mockler to Michael Herbert, July 14, 1986.

Following the passing of Anṣārī 1864, Muḥammad Mirza al-Shirāzī (b.1815) was selected as the most qualified mujtahid to succeed him.[233] Shirāzī' impact of world politics was marked by his 1891 'Tobacco Fatwā', which declared the use of tobacco to be tantamount to war against the Twelfth Imām in-occultation.[234] The British were granted monopolistic control over Iranian tobacco production, sale and exportation by Iran's monarch Nasir al-Din Shah. The concession came despite his initial prioritisation of religious sensitives, demonstrated by his first official foreign visit to Iraq's shrine cities in 1871.[235] The concession deeply upset the clerical authority, leading Shirāzī to send a stern telegram rebuking the Shah, stating:

> Permitting foreigners to interfere in the internal affairs of the country, their intermingling and closeness with the Muslim people, and the act of the banking, tobacco, and railroad concession and so forth are contrary to the Quran and Godly principles, weakens the independence of the state and the order of the country and deteriorate the condition of the people.[236]

Shirāzī physical location in Karbalāʾ did not impede his impact on Iranian politics, as the Shah was eventually forced to renege on the Tobacco concession. The significance of the tobacco *fatwā* lies in its transnational nature. It demonstrated that clerical participation is more viable

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[233] Shirāzī would become infamous for his 1891 Tobacco *fatwā*, discussed in the following two chapters. For details on his political theology, see Muḥammad G. Ayub, *Aspects of the Political Theory of Imām Muḥammad Shirāzī* (London: Foundation Books, 1999).

[234] For an extensive examination of the Tobacco Fatwā and its impact on Islamic society, see Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-92* (New York: Routledge, 1967); Moaddel, "Shīʿī Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892"; Interviews conducted in this thesis revealed the adjectives "Hidden" or "Vanished" Imām have derogatory connotations in such contexts.

[235] Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imām*, 176.

[236] Moaddel, "Shīʿī Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1980-1892", 460.

from afar because clerics do not have to consider local consequences.[237] The event also underscored the extent to which the sacred authority in shrine cities were capable of pivoting world politics.

The three key Shīʿī scholars responsible for the rise of the cities of Najaf, Karbalāʾ and Sāmarrāʾ were al-Najafi, Anṣārī and al-Shirāzī respectively. These leaders embodied Weber's "charisma of office", enabling the *ḥawza* to expand its reach from purely theological matters to broader aspects of social life.[238] As the role of the Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* grew, so too did sectarian animosities at the local level, which were encouraged by the state. In March 1884, Ottoman officers incited Sunnī rioters to attack Shirāzī's *ḥawza* in Sāmarrāʾ, reportedly beating and robbing his students. According to diplomatic communiques from the event, many Shīʿas were injured, and two students were killed.[239] Local sectarian flashpoints such as these were not uncommon, and the Ottoman sultan and the Persian shah would often seek to play a mediating role in easing tensions. Likewise, the British also sent emissaries to Sāmarrāʾ to offer a hand in mediation. Shirāzī, however, would not accept outside help for what he considered an "internal Muslims affair in which Britain had no business interfering".[240]

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[237] Alshamary's analysis shows that it is much easier for a "cleric to issue a fatwa in support of protest outside their own community. See Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 106.

[238] For the genesis of "charisma of office", see Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society. An outline of Interpretive Sociology), eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, part III chap.9 (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968); Several scholars have associated Weberian theory with Shiʿi leadership. See Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests"; Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism*; Liyakat N. Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Douglas F. Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17:1 (March 1978): 1-18.

[239] "Petition by Indian Students to the British Consul" enclosed in FO 195/1841 Baghdad no 210/23, Mockler to Currie, April 21, 1984.

[240] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq,* 169.

Najafi, Anṣārī and Shirāzī displayed varying degrees of interest in political affairs. The institution of the *ḥawza* enhanced the *ʿulamā'*s influence on state and society and facilitated its expansion through the development of uṣūlī functions. The expansion of the *ʿulamā*'s role in society gave rise to transnational networks of religious authority. However, the enhanced role of Iraq's *marjaʿiyya* and its tension with the Ottoman and Qajar empires also fostered distinct collective identities in shrine cities. As Louër alludes to this by suggesting that "the only relevant regional identity Mohammad al-Shirāzī seemed to have been ready to assume was Karbalāʾs".[241] Charismatic and innovative clericalism was a key factor contributing to the emergence of collective Shīʿī identity. Another was the early emergence of transnational clerical families from Jabel ʿĀmel, Lebanon.

Muhsin b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Amīn (b. 1867) was a mujtahid from the prominent Lebanese clerical family responsible for transforming the practices and rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ while rejecting tabtir.[242] Studying at the *ḥawza* in Najaf, Amin reformed the rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ emphasising prayer recitation and distribution of food to the poor (harissa).[243] Zarcone observed that around 1885 Ottoman policy towards *ziyārat* softened, forming part of a broader pan-Islamic policy.[244] As ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals were allowed to take place in public, Muhsin galvanised collective

[241] Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics,* 101.

[242] Muhsin wrote: "The usage of swords, chains, drums, horns and the likes today, which have become common in mourning ceremonies on ʿĀshūrāʾ, is definitely forbidden and against religious doctrine". See Muhsin al-Amin, *Risalat al-tanzih li-a'mal al-shabih* (Sidon, 1928/9), 30.

[243] Muhsin al-Amîn, *Autobiographie d'un clerc chiite du Jabal 'Âmil*, trans. Mervin et H. al-Amîn, , Damascus: IFEAD, 1998).

[244] Thierry Zarcone, "La situation du chi'isme à Istanbul au XIXe siècle et au début du XXe siècle", in *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, éd. Thierry Zarcone and F. Zarinebaf-Shahr, (Istanbul-Téhéran: IFÉA/IFRI, 1993), 75-93.

transnational Shīʿī identity by bringing Lebanese ʿAmili followers to the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in Damascus where he eventually took residence.[245]

Muhsin contributed to the crystallisation of shrine cities as sites of collective transnational identity in two key ways. First, he expanded his network from Jabal ʿĀmel by developing ties with clerical communities in the shrine cities of Iraq and Syria. Second, his reinterpretation of ʿĀshūrāʾ provided a transnational alternative to the traditional and fanatical interpretations of Muharram rituals. The nineteenth century represents a period of rapid transnational ritualisation in Shīʿīsm. The clerical families of Jabal ʿĀmel enhanced shrine cities as spaces of collective identity reproduction through ʿĀshūrāʾ observance and expanding the transnational realm of clerical Shīʿīsm.

Scholarship often equates the growth of pre-modern Shīʿī shrines with the growth of the Safavid (1501-1736) and Qajar (1794-1925) dynasties, ignoring the deeply historical, transnational networks fostered between clerics across Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and the Indian subcontinent. Some sources go as far as tracing the links between Najafi clerics and the Amilis to the time of the occultation of the twelfth Imām in 864 CE.[246] Notably, Hezbollah promotes ancient historiographies detailing the networks between the scholars of Jabal ʿĀmel and the Safavid Empire. The group uses precepts of the past to legitimise modern relations between

[245] Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite*, 246- 247.

[246] Abisaab Rula, "Shiʿite Beginnings and Scholastic Tradition in Jabal 'Amil in Lebanon'", *The Muslim World* 89:1 (1999): 1-21.

Iran and Lebanon through Shīʿī solidarity.[247] The emergence of the ʿAmili movement in southern Lebanon, and its impact on transnational Shīʿīsm leading up to the 20th century contributed to the deeply transnational history of Shīʿī shrine cities. Having established the transnational evolution of Shīʿī shrine cities in the 18th and 19th century, the following section introduces the Ṣadrist movement and its development throughout the 20th century.

20th Century Shrine Cities and The Clerical Families of Transnational Shīʿīsm

Lineage played a key role in the emergence of 20th century transnational Shīʿīsm, in particular the movements of the al-Ṣadr family. Originating in Jabal ʿĀmel, the family traces its lineage to the sixth and seventh Shīʿī Imāms, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765) and his son Mūsá al-Kāzim (d. 799). This elite Ṣadrist family produced many distinguished Shīʿī scholars in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, with many reaching the status of grand *marjaʿ taqlīd* (source of emulation). Born in Qom in 1779, Grand Ayatollah Ṣadr al-Din bin Saleh was the patriarch of the Ṣadr family and had five sons who also reached scholarly excellence. The Ṣadrists' tuition was heterogeneous. Because Jabal ʿĀmel in Lebanon remained the Ṣadr homeland, members would freely expand their religious networks, spending time abroad teaching and studying at the seminaries in shrine cities across Iraq, Iran and Syria. Shrine cities such as Isfahan, Karbalāʾ, Najaf, Qom, Mashhad, Sāmarrāʾ and Sayyida Zaynab enhanced the prestige of the Ṣadrist family, and fostered transnational networks of Shīʿī clerics, students, and pilgrims. Haydar al-Ṣadr exemplified the family's transnational identity and attachment to shrine cities.

[247] Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Post-Revolutionary Iran and Shiʿi Lebanon: Contested Histories", *Journal of Middle East Studies* 39:2 (2007): 533-562.

Grand Ayatollah Haydar al-Ṣadr (b. 1891) was born in Sāmarrāʾ and was first to adopt the as-Ṣadr surname which established a long lineage of Shīʿī scholarship. Haydar's nephew Mūsā al-Ṣadr (b. 1928) was born and studied in Qom. Mūsā rose to prominence in Iran engaging in debates surrounding Islamic theology and issues of class structure and social marginalisation.[248] Pursing his political impetus, Mūsā started a "full secular education" alongside his theological studies for a period in Tehran before returning to Qom, then onto Najaf, following the death of his father in 1953.[249] In Najaf, Mūsā studied under the tutelage of Grand Ayatollahs such as Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970) and Abü Qasim al-Khūʾī (1992). Here, he attained the level of mujtahid. Across the Muslim world, Mūsā was a prominent advocate of transnational Shīʿa resistance against imperialism. He played a key role in the Lebanese Civil War which began in 1975 and was also instrumental in fostering ties between then Syrian president Hafez Assad and opponents of the Shah of Iran.[250] Ṣadr did so by unifying the political power of the Syrian 'Alawīs leadership with Twelver Shīʿīsm.

Mūsā's two teachers in Najaf, al-Hakim and al-Khūʾī, came from prominent families in clerical Shīʿīsm, both tracing their lineage through Imām ʿAli.[251] Al-Khūʾī was considered by many as a rival to Grand Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of Shīʿīsm in the 20th century.[252] His conception of Islam differed from Iran's *Velāyat-e Faqīh* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) which argues the necessity of Islamic theocratic governance as a material requirement for the

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[248] See Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imām: Mūsā al Ṣadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[249] Hussein Chehabi and Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[250] Ajami, *The Vanished Imām.*

[251] Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism*, 13-17.

[252] Nasr, *The Shia Revival*.

return of the 12th Imām in Shīʿīsm.[253] Al-Khūʾī and his successor Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī refute this notion and more broadly dispute the blending of religion and politics. What emerged between the *ḥawzāt* of Qom and Najaf was a rivalry of sorts between the political and pro-Iran interpretation and an apolitical quietism which scholars such as al-Khoei and Sistānī promoted.[254]

Qom understandably reinforces the theological legitimacy of the Islamic Republic in Iran, while Najaf's apolitical stance enhances its transnational appeal, and its fertility to reproducing transnational identity. Due to the oppression of Baʿathist Iraq throughout the 20th century, the al-Khūʾī tradition of apolitical Islam transnationalised through philanthropic networks in the UK and North America.[255] Following the fall of Saddam in 2003, families exercising clerical authority in shrine cities, such as the Ṣadrists increasingly found themselves in competition with Iran's pursuit of influence through shrines. The next section addresses the geopolitics of Shīʿī shrine cities and Iran's so called "Shīʿī Crescent".

Shīʿī Shrine Cities and Iran's "Shīʿī Crescent"

The question of Iranian power in post-Saddam Iraq raises the important issue of distinguishing between Iran's state-driven Shīʿīsm and the organic rise of collective Shīʿī identity in Iraq. The absence of US hegemony creates a structural vacuum, culturally and normatively fertile to the

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[253] For an introduction to this point of Shīʿīsm and its political applications, see Nikki Keddie, ed. *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiʿism from Quietism to Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

[254] Rather than framing the ʿulamā' in dichotomous activist-quietist terms, Corboz addresses the political fluidity of expression taking places through the *ḥawza* as "moments of activism" or "moments of participation". See Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism*, 120.

[255] *Ibid*, 18.

notional "Shīʿī Crescent".[256] Gaining rhetorical traction in 2004, a thematic sectarian argument levelled against Iran was its desire to expand influence across what King Abdullah II of Jordan termed the "Shīʿī Crescent". Various Sunnī leaders have used this term to describe Iran's pursuit for influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. While such a simplification might appear overzealous, just one-decade earlier Ayatollah Khomeini declared: "State boundaries are the product of a deficient human mind… The revolution does not recognize borders and frontiers, it will go through them".[257] The "Shīʿī Crescent" is often used interchangeably with the "Axis of Resistance" or the "Shīʿa Corridor".[258] The argument that Iran seeks a regional "Shīʿa Crescent" has often been evidenced by its revolutionary ideological foundations. However, many approaches, including some quite conventional theories, would see the construction of strategic depth through transnational religious solidarity as unremarkably rational. After all, centuries earlier, both the Persian and Ottoman empires, as well as the British through the 'Oudh Bequest', sought geostrategic influence through shrine cities centuries earlier.

Azandehie and Kiani from Tehran University construct a persuasive counterargument to the discourse on Shīʿī geopolitics, contesting claims of both cartographic and geographic

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[256] While Iran's utilisation of shrines as tools of soft power and the "Shia Crescent" do not feature prominently in this thesis, it is necessary to briefly address these terms for posterity.

[257] Ervand Ambrahamian, *Khomenism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 43.

[258] Mohammad Soltaninejad, "Coalition-Building in Iran's Foreign Policy: Understanding the 'Axis of Resistance'", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21:6 (2019): 716-731; Avi Melamed, "Iran Can't Fulfill Its Hopes of a Shia Corridor Without Iraq", *Atlantic Council*, 11 October 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-can-t-fulfill-its-hopes-of-a-shia-corridor-without-iraq/; For Iran's "forward-defence" strategy with particular reference to the Syrian conflict, see Shahram Akbarzadeh, William Gourlay and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iranian Proxies in the Syrian Conflict: Tehran's 'Forward-defence' in Action", *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2022): 1-24; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran's Syrian Foreign Policy Objectives" in *The Arab World and Iran: A Turbulent Region in Transition*, ed. Amin Saikal (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 127-143.

authority.[259] The authors assert that the "Shīʿa Crescent" discourse is best understood as a co-construction of Nye's genealogy of soft power and Foucault's palaeontology and genealogy.[260] As this discursive reading explores, Sunnī-majority states construct the "Shīʿa Crescent" to justify pre-existing strategic objectives against Iran.[261] In 2004, Nye offered a useful definition of genealogical soft power as,

> the ability to shape others' preferences which are usually tied with abstract properties like character, culture, value, political institution, and influencing policies in a way to be considered as legitimate or having ethical validity.[262]

American scholarship, and to a lesser extent, British scholarship, increasingly accepts the "Shīʿī Crescent" discourse as an overarching a priori for a multitude of political complexities seemingly entrenched within the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide.[263] This complicates the task of distinguishing between inter-group sectarian animosities, competing geopolitical interests, and the organic power of Shīʿī shrine cities. To distinguish this organic power vested in shrine cities, it is necessary to address some historically relevant instances of state-sponsored

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[259] Marjan Azandehie and Vahid Kiani, "A Critique on Shia Geopolitics Discourse; With Emphasis on Genealogical Approach", *Geopolitics* 9:4 (Winter 2014): 83-106.

[260] *Ibid.*

[261] Akbarzadeh and Barry argue that "Iran's corporate identity is triangulated in three key elements of a new nationalism: Iranism, Islam and Shiʿism". See Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry, "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43:4 (2016): 613-629, 614.

[262] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 7.

[263] Nasr, *The Shia Revival*; Juan Cole, Kenneth Katzman, Karim Sadjadpour and Ray Takeyh, "A Shia Crescent: What Fallout for the United States?", *Middle East Policy* 12:4 (Winter 2005): 1-27; Samuel Helfont, "The Muslim Brotherhood and the Emerging Shia Crescent'", *Orbis* 53:2 (Spring: 2009): 284-299; Jakub Hodek and Miguel Panadero, "Iran Strategic Report", *Center For Global Affairs & Strategic Studies: Universidad de Navarra* (2019): 1-54, https://www.unav.edu/documents/16800098/17755721/Iran-Strategic-Report_JHodek-MPanadero.pdf.

sectarianisation of shrines. Contemporaneously, this takes shapes through Iran's IRGC and Hezbollah.

Iranian Geopolitics and Collective Transnational Shīʿī Identity

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is Iran's primary strategic and foreign policy wing. Created in 1980, the Quds Force is an extraterritorial unit of Iran's IRGC which specialises in unconventional warfare and military intelligence. The Quds Force's mission has always been to expand Iranian influence in the region, mostly through the notion of the "Shia Crescent". Fusing collective Shīʿī identity with anti-hegemonistic attitudes, the transnational network effectively utilises sectarian grievances for geopolitical purposes. The Quds Force created, trained, and financed Shīʿī militias from Afghanistan and Pakistan, known as the Fatemiyoun Division (Hezbollah Afghanistan) and Liwa Zainebiyoun (People of Zaynab Brigade), to assist the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War (2011-). The official purpose and recruitment pitch of these groups centres on defence of the shrine of Zaynab. However, most of both divisions, some as young as 14, died on the frontlines of Dara, Aleppo and Palmyra. In both cases, the militias comprise of economically disadvantaged, mostly Persian speaking, ethnic Hazaras. Recruits are promised Iranian citizenship and salaries in return for fighting in Syria.[264] The IRGC use sectarian propaganda to recruit disenfranchised youths to fight in conflicts under constructed religious pretext. This example illustrates a depth of transnationalism in contemporary Shīʿī politics and Iran's preference to rely on religion as a

[264] For an extensive analysis of the origins and expansion of the Fatemiyoun Division see Tobias Schneider, "The Fatemiyoun Division: Afghan Fighters in The Syrian Civil War", *Middle East Institute Policy Paper* (October 2018): 1-23.

geostrategic tool and source of legitimacy. Iran's prominent role in Syria is relatively recent in comparison to its strategic position in Iraq.

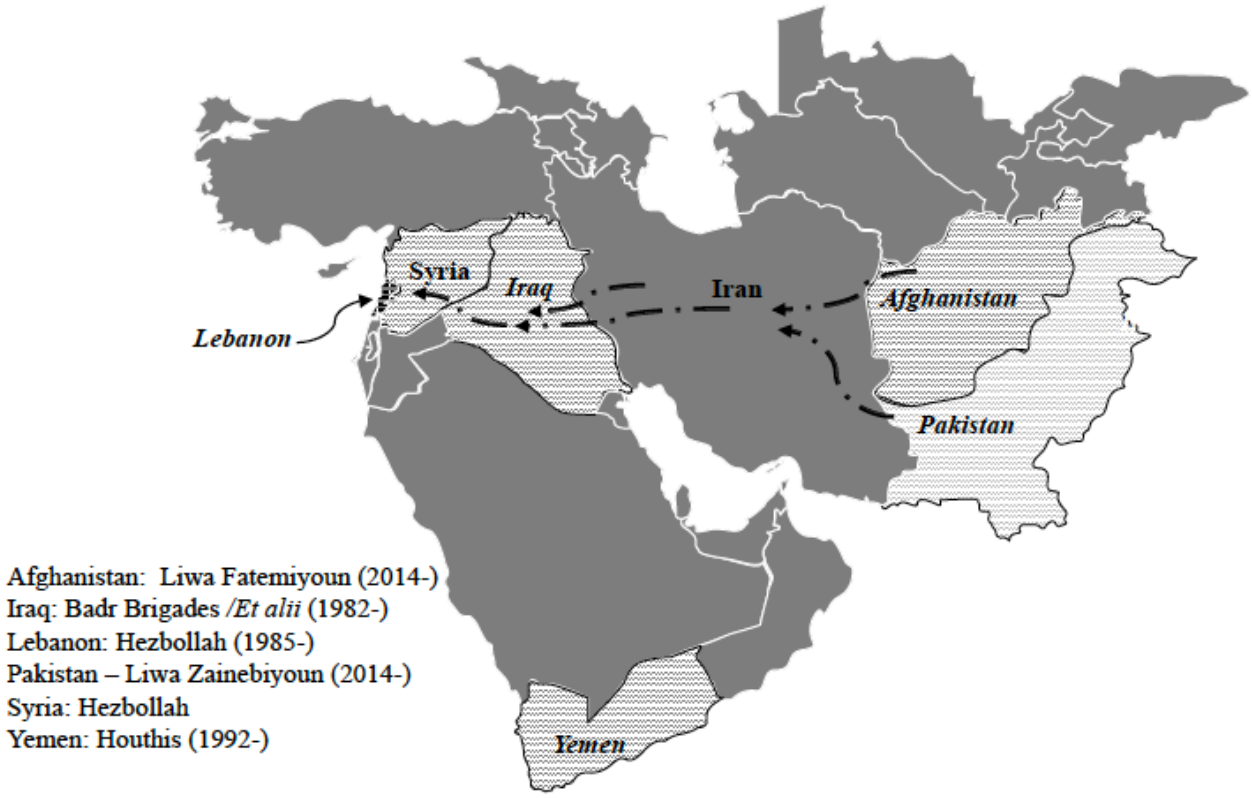

FIGURE 4 - THE IRANIAN QUDS FORCE'S TRANSNATIONAL SHĪʿĪ NETWORK (ORIGINAL SOURCE).

Transnational Shīʿīsm in Post-Saddam Iraq

Iran undoubtedly sought an enhanced hand in Iraqi politics following the US withdrawals beginning in 2007. However, an important precursor to the structural vacuum Iran filled in Iraq was the multi-faceted ethno-sectarian conflict and insurgency culminating in 2006. It is difficult to understate the factional complexities and fluidity of alliances driving sectarian violence in Iraq between 2006 and 2008. The long oppressed Iraqi Shīʿa collective mostly rallied support behind prominent cleric Muqtada al-Ṣadr and his "Mahdi Army". During this period of renewed Shīʿī eminence, shrine cities played a pivotal role in fostering collective

identity and enabling the mobilisation of transnational movements, while discouraging violence.[265]

Muqtada Al-Ṣadr continued the work of his family, promoting the ideals of Shīʿa Islamism and Iraqi nationalism, which appealed to the lower classes of Iraqi society. A staunchly nationalist movement, the Ṣadrists fundamentally rejected the foreign occupation of the US. Ṣadr led a brutal insurgency campaign against US forces in Iraq. According to some reports, Ṣadr's Mahdi Army commanded around 80,000 troops between 2006-2008. The Mahdi Army had its internal factions. However, it was highly cohesive in comparison to the Sunnī factions which included militant Salafīsm, various Sunnī tribes, and disparate Iraqi Baʿathist Party loyalists.

Ṣadr utilised the Shīʿa motif of resistance against foreign oppression to great effect, winning hearts and minds against the US in Iraq, filling the void of Iraqi nationalism with a revolutionary brand of patriotic populism and Shīʿī Islamism. During an interview in 2003, Ṣadr declared "Saddam was the little devil, but America is the great devil".[266] In this sense, Ṣadr's objective of fighting US forces in Iraq aligned with Iran's interest in US a withdrawal. Although Al-Ṣadr professes and supports revolutionary Twelver Shīʿīsm, his conviction is one of Iraqi independence from all forms of oppression and external influence. While not instantly apparent or pressingly incongruent with Iranian interests in Iraq, Ṣadr's anti-hegemonistic

[265] Isakhan, "The Islamic State Attacks on Shia Holy Sites and the "Shrine Protection Narrative".

[266] Peter Klein, "Iraqi Cleric Al-Ṣadr Re-Emerges", *60 Minutes Overtime*, 24 September 2014, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/muqtada-al-Ṣadr-iraqi-cleric-re-emerges/.

attitudes and patriotic convictions encouraged Iran to support other Shīʿī forces with a variety of competing motivations and convictions within Iraq's PMF.

Identity Wars and Iran's Sectarian Proxies in Iraq

While the US sought to integrate the Kurds into the already complex Sunnī-Shīʿa landscape of Iraqi governance, Iran's IRGC and its Quds Forces began training and providing support to elements of Iraq's PMF. In 2017, Mansour and Jabar divided the Shīʿīte faction of the PMF into three broad allegiance based-categories.[267] The main Shīʿīte component is the pro-Khamenei faction which maintains strong ties with Iran and professes religious allegiance to Khamenei and the Islamic Republic's *velāyat-e faqīh* system. The pro-Khamenei faction consists of a cluster of paramilitaries such as Kataʿib Hezbollah, Kataʿib Abu Fadhi al-Abbas, the Badr Organisation and Asaʿib Ahl al-Haq.[268] This faction contains some of the most aggressive drivers of sectarian violence in Iraq. The emergence of this faction was significant for two central reasons. First, it highlights Iran's material interest in the politics of Iraq. Second, it highlights the Iraqi Shīʿīte's broad preference for Iranian influence over continued US presence, and closely associated with this, perceived imperialism.

The second category within the Shīʿīte faction of the PMF are pro-Sistānī forces. Mansour and Jabar argue these factions were formed "strictly by Sistānī's *fatwā* to defend Shīʿī holy sites and lands from the so-called Islamic State".[269] Al-Qaeda and ISIS' iconoclastic rhetoric against

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[267] Renad Mansour and Faleh Jabar, "The Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraq's Future", *Carnegie Middle East Center* (April 2017): 1-42.

[268] *Ibid.*

[269] *Ibid*, 21.

holy sites served to securitise shrines, catalysing the creation of four main groups organised in Najaf: Saraya al-Ataba al-Abbasiya, Saraya al-Ataba al-Hussainiya, Saraya al-Ataba al-Alawiya and Liwa 'Ali al-Akhbar. Importantly, each of these groups' names coincides with the holy shrines of Kadhimiya, Karbalāʾ and Najaf. Chiefly guided by the clerical authority of Sistānī, these groups do not shy from displays of collective identity in times of religious observance such as Muharram. However, the faction is reactionary in nature and contextually conscious, hence the circumstantial need for shrine protection following the rise of ISIS.[270]

The third category within the Shīʿīte faction is the group led by Muqtada al-Ṣadr. For all its capacity to attract fighters, the capacity of the group was constrained by a lack of resources. Ṣadr therefore aligned his forces with Iran during the US occupation and subsequent insurgency but gradually diverged from Iran, preferring a more nationalistic stance. Unlike the pro-Khamenei groups, the Ṣadrists' independent stance resulted in Iran cutting funding from the group in 2016. Ṣadr commands local authority and legitimacy as both a respected cleric and fighter against the US occupation.

The pro-Ṣadr faction espouse broadly assertive sectarianism, which is at times militant. Haddad observed that in the 2006-2007 period symbols of assertive and aggressive sectarianism transcended militant circles to include rhetorical devices of speeches, poetry, and song.[271] He cites the chorus from a Ṣadrist anthem espousing clear militant sectarianism,

> Let them meet us [in battle]

[270] Isakhan, "The Islamic State Attacks on Shia Holy Sites and the "Shrine Protection Narrative".

[271] Farnar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (London: Hurst, 2011), 187.

> Let them hear us: a Shiʿa roar
>
> Let the Wahhābīs meet us [in battle]
>
> By Ali we will turn al-Latifyah upside down.[272]

Contrasting the aggressive sectarianism displayed in the Ṣadrist anthem, pro-Sistānī voices display quietist sectarianism reflecting the foundations of religious legitimacy. A popular poem recited by Shīʿa forces in battle can be seen below, as inscribed by the Iraqi Shīʿa poet Mohammad al-Aajeebi:

> We want to show you, O' unjust, who is behind Zaynab the daughter of Ali,
>
> I held my gun and it shook out of fear, I am the one who is in front of Zaynab and behind her,
>
> The militias kept silent for the sake of Marjaiyya [Sistānī], and they were waiting for a word from Mohammad's father [Sistānī],
>
> And tonight he struck his stick against the floor and said it [fatwā].[273]

Al-Aajeebi's poem depicts Shīʿīsm as a diffusely structured and multi-layered transnational movement, linking memory with militia and militia with *marjaʿ*. This is significant because it underscores the power of the pro-Sistānī faction, the power of transnational clerical authority and the role shrines play in mobilising forces. However, the pro-Sistānī factions inspired by Sistānī's 2014 *fatwā*, subsequently withdrew from the PMF. In 2021, Mansour reported:

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[272] *Ibid*.

[273] Mohammad al-Aa'jeebi, "Jadeed Alsha'r Mohammad al-Aa'jeebi Ela Da'sh [The New Poem of Mohammad, al-Aa'jeebi to ISIS]," al-Jabal *YouTube*, 14 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGaiohT1i34.

> These groups remained loyal primarily to their source of emulation, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī, and opposed the groups in the network that were close to Iran. Sistānī himself has refused to recognise the PMF, and his representatives never mention the PMF in public statements or in private interviews with the author.[274]

Despite the eventual banality of the pro-Sistānī militias, Iran still sought geostrategic depth through shrine cities. Around 2013, the term 'holy shrine defender' appeared in Iranian media in response to attacks on the shrine of Zaynab in Damascus.[275] The term served as a useful recruitment tool for Iran's transnational proxy forces, and to implicitly claim responsibility for the defence of shrines such as Karbalāʾ. Due to the divisions discussed above, it is analytically problematic to treat the Shīʿa bloc in Iraq monolithically. A key division which emerged within the PMF was alignment with Iran. Having outlined the general structure of transnational Shīʿī groups seeking influence in post-invasion Iraq, it is important to discuss Iran's direct soft power shrine strategy.

Iran's Soft Power Shrine Strategy

As previously mentioned, the historical shrines of Karbalāʾ and Najaf are relatively independent domains of transnational Shīʿīsm that often challenge the social legitimacy of the Iraqi state and the religious authority of Iran's state driven Shīʿīsm. Nonetheless, Iran's soft power strategy in Iraq can be traced back at least to the IRGC's engineering wing, Khātam al-Anbiyā, during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1989). Khātam al-Anbiyā is one of Iran's largest

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[274] Renad Mansour, "Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the State in Iraq", *Chatham House Research Paper – Middle East and North Africa Program* (2021): 1-44, 11.

[275] "The formation of the nukes of the International Shi'a Army Defend Hazrat Zainab's Mahram with the Name of Abolfazl al-Abbas", *Mehrnews.com*, 8 May 2013, https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2050273/شکل-گیری-هسته-های-سپاه-بین-المللی-شیعیان-برای-دفاع-از-حرم-حضرت/news.

construction and development companies, supported heavily by the IRGC but sanctioned by the US in 2007.[276]

After 2003, Iran established the "Headquarters for the Restoration of Holy Shrines" (HRHS) to restore and develop sacred sites in Najaf, Karbalāʾ, Sāmarrāʾ and Kazemein.[277] As protectors and promotors of revolutionary Shīʿīsm, Iran and its IRGC affiliates assumed responsibility of protecting Shīʿī shrines. Logistically and financially, Khātam al-Anbiyāʿ supports the HRHS and its reported 200 restoration projects in Iraq's holy cities.[278]

The HRHS has a significance presence in Sayyida Zaynab, having raised over $1 billion dollars in fundraising. In 2019, Radio Farda reported that 3,000 Iranians were working on the project.[279] In March 2020, The US designated the "Reconstruction Organization of Holy Shrines in Iraq" as a terrorist organisation and front group linked to the IRGC-Quds force.[280] The HRHS's objectives across the region coalesce with Iran's desire for a 'Shīʿa Crescent' or

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[276] In addition to construction and development, the group also assisted a project building intermediate range missile launch pads for Venezuela. See Benjamin Weinthal, "'die Welt': Iran Building Rocket Bases for Venezuela", *Jerusalem Post*, 17 May 2011, https://www.jpost.com/international/die-welt-iran-building-rocket-bases-in-venezuela; "Designation of Iranian Entities and Individuals for Proliferation Activities and Support for Terrorism", *US State Department - Office of the Spokesman*, October 2007, https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/oct/94193.htm.

[277] Amir Toumaj, "Qods Force Front Group Develops Shrine in Iraq", *Long War Journal*, 23 September 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/qods-force-front-group-develops-shrine-in-iraq.php.

[278] All HRHS projects can be viewed on its discerningly titled website: https://ʿAtabāt.org/.

[279] Reza Haqiqatnezhad, "Qasem Soleimani Boosts Influence in Iraq, Strengthens Financial Cartel in Iran", *Radio Farda*, 26 July 2019, https://en.radiofarda.com/a/qasem-soleimani-boosts-influence-in-iraq-strengthens-financial-cartel-in-iran/30077375.html

[280] "Entity Sanctioned: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Qods Force", *Office of Foreign Assets Control*, March 2020, https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=10465.

support for the ‘Axis of Resistance’. The rhetoric of various Quds Force leaders, including the organisation’s mastermind Qassem Soleimani (d. 2019), repeatedly emphasised the importance of a Shīʿa corridor linking Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria through urban Shīʿī sites. It may seem tempting to view shrine cities through the lens of geopolitics and Iran’s regional objectives. However, this is a relatively recent development compared to the centuries of collective transnational identity and clerical authority Iraq’s shrines cities have reproduced. Transnational authority based on collective identity both predates and supersedes recent geopolitical manoeuvring.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to contextualise Shīʿī shrine cities in world politics. It traced the development of transnational Shīʿīsm and the evolution of shrine cities as spaces of collective Shīʿī identity. The first section established the centrality of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Shīʿī Islam and how the *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage between Karbalāʾ and Najaf reproduces collective Shīʿī identity through its associated rituals and practices. The second section examined the institutionalisation of Shīʿīsm through the historically influential Iraqi *ḥawza*. It highlighted the formation of transnational clerical networks and sacred authority. Aided by neo-uṣūlī developments, the symbiotic teacher-student arrangement of the *ḥawza* enhanced the transnational nature of shrine cities, attracting Shīʿī students and pilgrims from outside Iraq. The political turmoil and ideological oppression of the 19th century also contributed to the transnational character of Iraq's shrine cities. The third section examined the role of factional Shīʿī groups and sacred authority in post-Saddam Iraq. The fourth section critically evaluated the notional “Shīʿī Crescent” while also outlining the Islamic Republic of Iran’s contemporary regional shrine strategy.

In conclusion, Shīʿī shrine cities witnessed both continuity and change between the 18th and 21st centuries. The key finding of this chapter is that, across this period, pre-existing clerical authority was enhanced by the transnational adoption of Uṣūlīsm and downward intragenerational mobility between merchant and clerical families. Shrine cities facilitated these developments, contributing to the reproduction of collective transnational identity. In recent history, Shīʿī shrines have come to form a core component of Iran's regional projection of soft power. However, as this chapter demonstrated, multiple empires sought soft power through the *Atabāt*. Having established the historical evolution of transnational Shīʿīsm in shrine cities between the 15th and 21st centuries, the following chapter outlines the theoretical framework utilised in this thesis.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

This chapter details the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis, which is primarily drawn from theories on clerical authority, temporality, and the sociology of space. It explains how two dimensions of power – temporal and spatial – construct Najaf and Karbalāʾ as 'pivots' in world politics. The framework is inductively generated in the sense that themes were identified as they were discovered in the research.[281] Therefore, Najaf's temporal power is understood through the historical trajectory of its sacred authority, and Karbalāʾs spatial power is understood through its productive Ashura-oriented spaces and rituals which reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. It will be demonstrated that each case study animates a different dimension of power. However, both dimensions – temporal and spatial – are essential to the construction of Shīʿī shrines in world politics. Collectively, the framework demonstrates how the two dimensions of power mentioned above construct Shīʿī shrine cities as 'pivots' in world politics.

The first section introduces the three domains of world politics in IR. The second outlines the methodological design, procedure and justification. The third section expands on how pivots are used in this thesis. The fourth section outlines the temporal process used to understand the clerical power pivot in Najaf. This section utilises various theoretical debates concerning temporality in IR and Shīʿī political mobilisation, with a focus on the institutional aspects of clerical authority and responsibility. The final section outlines the spatial approach to power utilised to understand Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity. This section highlights how

[281] Creswell and Plano Clark describe inductive research as working "bottom-up, using the participants' views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes". See John Creswell and Vicki Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (London: SAGE, 2007), 23.

perspectival realism, which accepts that scientific representations are situated from a specific vantage point, is used to portray the "power of place" in Karbalāʾ.[282] It then outlines how existing understandings of the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm', are better understood through Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus'.[283] Ultimately, this approach uses a spatial and temporal approach, combining these with religious urbanity, poetic Shīʿī ritualisation, and the psychic, attitudinal and devotional elements of the 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'. The following section briefly outlines the three domains of world politics utilised throughout this thesis: interpolity, transnational and interhuman.

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[282] It does so by drawing on broader currents of spatiality and the power of place. Literature on the power of place is vast. See John Wissler, *Man and Culture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1923); Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934); Leslie White, *The Science of Culture* (New York: Grove Press 1949); Alfred Kroeber, *The Nature of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1954); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Geertz, *Local Knowledge*; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Lambert Van Der Lann and Andries van Piersma, "The Image of Man: Paradigmatic Cornerstone in Human Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geography* 72 (1982): 411-426; Harold Carter, *An Introduction to Urban Historical Geography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983); Alan Pred, "Structuration and Place: on Becoming of Sense of Place and Structure of Feeling", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 13 (1983): 45-68; Alan Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-geography of Becoming Places", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74 (1984): 279-297; Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); John Agnew and John Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Winchester: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995); Alan Baker and Gideon Biger, *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the Meanings of Some Places in the Past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Cynthia Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forest of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (London: Duke University Press 2005); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); These terms are described in detail on pages 120-127. For perspectival realism, see Michela Massimi, *Perspectival Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); For a useful overview of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm, see Afsar Mohammad, "Karbalāʾ in Shīʿī Ritual", *Oxford Bibliographies*, 24 March 2021, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0278.xml.

[283] As noted earlier, The Karbalāʾ Paradigm is a polysemic term coined by Fischer to describe how the Karbalāʾ narrative provides a "model for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live". Fischer, *Iran,* 21.

Domains in World Politics

The three domains of world politics in English School (ES) theory – interpolity, transnational and interhuman – represent a useful taxonomy for this thesis's approach to the temporality of Najaf's clerical authority.[284] Politics between states, empires, cities, principalities, political units etc. is the defining activity of the interpolity domain.[285] The ES historically privileges this domain of world politics on the premise that political actors claim primacy over all other types of organisations. The transnational domain refers, in Buzan's words, to "collective non-state/polity actors (e.g. guilds, firms, religious organisations) and how they relate to both polities and to each other as transnational actors (TNA) across boundaries".[286] Advocacy is a characteristic activity of the transnational domain, and one of TNAs main purposes, both up to the interpolity domain (lobbying government, participating in diplomacy) and down to the interhuman domain (proselytising, recruiting, marketing).[287] The final domain is the interhuman domain. According to Buzan, the defining activity of the interhuman domain "is collective identity formation, a rather subtle and amorphous process, but one with big consequences for the social structure of humankind".[288] He notes that in this domain:

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[284] ES theory has evolved immensely since Martin Wight's "three traditions". See Martin Wight, *System of States* (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1977). Several ES scholars followed this tradition. Most prolifically, Barry Buzan innovated these "traditions" into differentiated domains of world politics. See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Barry Buzan and Mathias Albert, "Differentiation: A Sociological Approach to International Relations Theory", *European Journal of International Relations* 16:3 (2010): 315-337; Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations: The Societal Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society: A New Framework for Analysis*.

[285] Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global Society: From Before the Dawn of History to the Near Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2023 - Pre-print manuscript provided by author), 20.

[286] *Ibid*, 21.

[287] *Ibid*.

[288] *Ibid*.

> only individuals have actor quality, and *the main social structure is patterns of collective identity* [emphasis added] ranging from the universal one of humankind as a whole, through civilisational and religious identities, to racial, national, tribal and kinship. These identities do not in themselves possess actor quality, but they do act powerfully as constraints and opportunities to enable or constrain various kinds of actors in the transnational and interpolity domains, e.g. religious institutions, nations states.[289]

The inter-human domain plays a crucial role in this thesis as it enables the clerical authority to use collective Shīʿī identity to pivot world politics in the transnational and interpolity domains. Having established the three domains of world politics, the following section describes the methodological design, procedure and justification.

Design, Procedure and Justification

Time as a theoretical tool and political phenomenon offers greater historical contextualisation of Najaf's clerical power. A historical account of *fatwā* mobilisation is utilised to identify how Najaf's clerical authority pivots world politics. Historical methods contribute to greater plurality in IR and enable research into phenomena that is difficult to observe or access.[290] Moreover, they provide a richer and contextually sensitive understanding of institutions over time.

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[289] *Ibid*.

[290] Joseph MacKay and Christopher David LaRoche, "The Conduct of History in International Relations: Rethinking Philosophy of History in IR Theory", *International Theory* 9:2 (2017): 203-236; Joel Quirk, "Historical Methods", in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 518-536; George Lawson and John Hobson, "What is History in International Relations?", *Millennium* 37:2 (2008): 415-435.

A form of cartographic perspectival realism illustrates how Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented places, spaces and spots construct the city as a pivot in world politics by reproducing collective Shīʿī identity. This spatial approach demonstrates how Karbalāʾs cultural landscape locus represents a sacred reminder of Shīʿī history, identity, heritage, memory and pilgrimage. Complementing this geographic understanding of collective identity are elements of Shīʿī ritual and pilgrimage, which reinforce the salience of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative in world politics. The principal advantage of this method is its capacity to provide empirically grounded conceptualisations of Karbalāʾ without sacrificing insights from 'local' understandings. By linking the theoretical constructs with empirical findings, the results offer a cultural cartographic depiction of Karbalāʾ and its reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity.

Methodology

As noted, this thesis takes a qualitative approach which falls under the broad umbrella of methodological pluralism. The temporal chapters on Najaf rely primarily on process tracing and content analysis of primary and secondary sources.[291] Primary sources include *fatwās* and *bayans* issued by relevant *ʿulamāʾ*, and primary autobiographic accounts by relevant actors. *Fatwās* are religiously binding legal decrees. *Bayans* are opinions or statements of religious attitudes that fall short of a fully-fledged *fatwā* but are still an official pronouncement. Secondary sources enrich the analysis by contextualising Iraq's socio-political situation. Because the Covid-19 pandemic prevented in-country fieldwork, the Najaf chapters involved extended desktop research and online archival work.

[291] See Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds., *Process Tracing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi, *Content Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Chapters Three and Four combine Arabic and Persian archival materials such as anthologies, historiographies and biographies with diplomatic communiques, clerical edicts and secondary sources to examine novel encounters between the religious authority in Najaf and various domains of international politics during 'critical temporalities'. Archival and interview materials inform first-hand historical accounts of key events. These include diplomatic communiques such as records of colonial British telegrams and diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks. An array of Arabic materials including historiographies and biographies are also consulted. Colonial sources are consulted critically to identify, among other things, problematic orientalist understandings of Iraq's clerical authority. *Fatwās* are used as a source of data. Methods of discourse and content analysis focusing on religious pronouncements reveal a great deal about the impact of *fatwās* in the Muslim world and sacralised authority in Shīʿī shrine cities during the 20th century. The significance of *fatwās* in the Muslim world also reveals a great deal about the ways in which Najaf's clerical class pivot world politics.

Chapters Five and Six also rely on primary and secondary sources. Primary source data is generated from digital ethnographic interviews and an array of primary source materials. Digital ethnography is a form of ethnography mediated by technology which gained popularity as a method following the outbreak of Covid-19.[292] Similar to Najaf, secondary sources are used to triangulate and contextualise the data. The thesis' method of digital ethnography involved a series of structured and semi-structured, synchronous and asynchronous interviews,

[292] Lauren Angelone, "Virtual Ethnography: The Post Possibilities of Not Being There", *Mid-Western Educational Researcher* 31:3 (2018): 275-295; Nona Schulte-Römer and Friederike Gesing, "Online, Offline, Hybrid: Methodological Reflection on Event Ethnography in (post-) Pandemic Times", *Qualitative Research* 0:0 (2021): 1-16.

in addition to textual analysis of a range of primary and secondary Arabic, Persian and English sources.

To understand the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ, the research was triangulated through a series of iterative qualitative interviews with six Iraqi and Iranian Shīʿī scholars located in the shrine cities of Karbalāʾ, Najaf and Qom.[293] Various digital platforms were used to conduct interviews, including email, Telegram and WhatsApp. Interviews were mainly conducted in English, while the remainder were conducted in Arabic and transcribed into English. All participants possessed tertiary university levels of education. Participants' interview consent was obtained in all cases, and follow-up quotation attributions were confirmed using the platforms mentioned above.

Interviews varied in duration and frequency, as did sampling questions and their snowballing trajectories. Data was collected, iteratively refined and clarified through several follow-up informal interviews. This study was feasible due to the small sample size. Assistance from the Office of the Holy Shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn and iterations with religio-pragmatics expert Muḥammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani were foundational to this study's approach and contribution. Interviews were open-ended in nature. The total length of this digital-ethnographic approach involved approximately 100 hours of interviews. Most of these interviews were undertaken informally in the weeks and months preceding up to the holy month of Muharram, in August-September 2021. These interviews were followed by formal interviews, which were conducted

[293] The socio-spatial element of this theory's application to Karbalāʾ is outlined in Aidan Parkes, "The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage: Karbalāʾ's Religious Urban Fabric and Reproduction of Collective Shīʿī Identity", *Religions* 12:10 (2021): 904; This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Australian National University (Protocol 2021/521) Approved 23/09/2021.

throughout September and October 2021. Indicative sample questions began by understanding the religious urban fabric of Karbalāʾ through architectural representation. Follow-up questions concentrated on issues related to territoriality, the importance of ʿĀshūrāʾ, and how sacred spaces represent, evoke, and inspire collective identity and memory.

The participants represent an epistemic community of intellectuals deeply connected to Shīʿī shrine cities: occupationally, ideologically, and lineally. One participant, for example, is a descendent of Ibrāhīm al-Mujāb, grandson of the seventh Imām in Shīʿīsm, Mūsa al-Kāzim. Data from the interviews discovered that his family have been administrative custodians of Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy shrine and sacred sanctuary for several generations. Another participant was a spiritual ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented linguistics professor based in an Iranian shrine city. Although not a traditional Shīʿī cleric, his attachment and devotion to Imām al-Ḥusayn, decades of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented scholarship, and linguistic expertise suited the scope of this thesis, with its focus on Shīʿī shrine cities and collective identity. The modest sample size of interviewees was chosen on the basis of their, knowledge, experience and status.

The research generated three findings of fundamental interest to this thesis. First, was an emphasis on the divine personality and position of Imām al-Ḥusayn in world history. Second, was an emphasis on the eternal sanctity of Karbalāʾ and its ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented sacred spaces. Third, was how culturally constructed collective memory and poetically prescribed rituals reproduce of collective identity in Karbalāʾ and beyond, largely because of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Data is depicted across several vector graphics and diagrams using cultural cartographic urban maps. The cultural cartographic maps were created using sketches provided by Shīʿī intellectuals associated with the shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Scholars have highlighted how geographic information system (GIS) technology combined with ethnographic interviews can enhance the communication of urban development results to stakeholders.[294] While this study's cultural cartographic procedure is similar, it uses the IPE extensible drawing editor software package. Using IPE, LaTex source code was utilised to create, render, and analyse cartographic maps and vector graphics. To ensure accuracy, the details and data depicted in the vector graphics were then iteratively clarified, refined and verified by custodians on Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy shrine, and third-party data repositories. The apparatus for the vector graphics was tailored to emphasise the sacred spaces and spots central to Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. Using a similar method in appraising the role of religious architecture in the city of Kielce in southern Poland, Gil-Mastalerczyk offers excellent insight into how religion-infused architecture and cultural heritage shape the urban city fabric.[295]

The resulting data links sacred spaces and collective memory with individual religio-moral psychic attitudes and incentives. The anatomy of Karbalāʾs urban landscape is posed in terms of space, memory and individual agency. This theory holds that ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented sacred spaces reinforce the narrative of Imām al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom, capable of initiating a religio-moral duty, 'impetus' or "ʿĀshūrāʾ Motivation" inspired by space and mnemonic rituals.

[294] See, for example, Chris Brennan-Horley, Chris Gibson, Susan Luckman and Julie Willoughby-Smith, "GIS Ethnography and Cultural Research: Putting Maps Back into Ethnographic Meaning", *The Information Society* 26 (2010): 92-103.

[295] Joanna Gil-Mastalerczyk, "The Place and Role of Religious Architecture in the Formation of Urban Space", *Procedia Engineering* 161 (2016): 2053-2057.

Integrating ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative's associated rituals illustrates a recursive cycle of collective identity reproduction. This method was chosen because it represents the most practical and feasible way to conceptualise Karbalāʾs construction in world politics as a pivot of collective identity. This particular approach was chosen in critical contrast to existing state-centric conceptions, as it utilises local understandings and beliefs of Karbalāʾs epistemic shrine community using data derived from interviews and primary sources. The approach represents a cross-disciplinary understanding of Karbalāʾ, which gives weight to the specific granularities of the ʿĀshūrāʾ events, ultimately contributing to the city's construction as a pivot in world politics.

Justification

Interview questions were designed to suit the respondents' areas of expertise. For example, while all respondents were Shīʿī intellectuals, one was an ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented religio-pragmatics professor while another was an expert on Karbalāʾs cultural heritage and architecture. This justifies the cross-disciplinary approach and explains the diversity of results and findings. It should be noted that effort was made to ensure diversity of respondents. However, due to the small sample size, the nationality, gender, and level of education of respondents was relatively indiscriminate. Relevant area of subject expertise, however, was prioritised. Given the qualitative and cross-disciplinary approach, participants were treated as experts of their own experiences rather than comparative ethnographic subjects. Common in health sciences and public policy, this approach is referred to as "human-centred design" (HCD).[296] Illuminations of the "power of place" and geographies of knowledge complemented these local

[296] See for instance, Christian Bason and Robert Austin, "Design in the Public Sector: Toward a Human Centred Model of Public Governance", *Public Management Review* (2021): 1-31.

understandings. Research questions avoided political topics for the safety of participants, hence the focus on religiosity and urban geography.

Chapters Three and Four examine the impact of *fatwās* across time as a form of advocacy to better understand how clerical power pivots world politics. Particular attention is paid to Najaf's clerical authority and its entanglements with imperial power. Chapter Three focuses on the temporality leading up to the establishment of the British Mandate in Iraq in 1920.[297] Chapter Four focuses on the temporality following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and clerical advocacy during the post-invasion reconstruction period. These periods were chosen because of the considerable agency of Najaf's clerical class during what can be regarded as critical periods in Iraq's quest for self-determination.

This approach is justifiable because the pivots concern differentiated domains of world politics. Clerical power deals intimately with the interpolity and transnational domains. For this reason, a temporal focus on *fatwās* is a useful way of understanding clerical advocacy in world politics. Given the political nature of clerical power and Iran's current involvement in Iraq's political field, primary and secondary source data was consulted as opposed to interviews. On the other hand, collective identity is a characteristic activity of the interhuman and, to a lesser extent, the transnational domain. For this reason, a socio-spatial understanding of Karbalāʾ illustrates how collective identity is reproduced through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and rituals.

[297] The following chapter outlines how the British Mandate, through the League of Nations, granted Great Britain indirect governance of Iraq through the Hashemite monarchy.

Chapters Five and Six examine the significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented socio-spatiality in Karbalāʾ to highlight how the collective identity pivot functions in and across world society. ES thought previously identified collective identity and advocacy as primary institutions of the transnational and interhuman domains respectively. Buzan recently revised this point, arguing that rather than primary institutions of specific domains, "these are characteristic activities of those domains".[298] Therefore, while earlier sections of the thesis examine the enduring advocacy of Najaf's clerical class and how advocacy in differentiated domains constructs the city as a pivot in world politics, Chapters Five and Six examine how Karbalāʾ reproduces ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented collective identity in Karbalāʾ and elsewhere.

Buzan's most recent work on global society emphasises that primary institutions are "located across, and embedded within, not just one, but two or three domains".[299] Najaf's clerical authority exemplifies this cross pollination. As a non-state actor transnational group, the clerical authority wields immense influence in the inter-human domain through its reproduction of collective identity, and also in the inter-polity domain through its advocacy on issues such as self-determination and sovereignty. Having established the methodological approach of the thesis, the following section outlines how pivots are used in this thesis.

Pivot Alterity in World Politics

The pivots utilised in this thesis depict an interplay between clerical authority and collective identity. This thesis accepts a dual meaning of the term as both a noun and a verb. As a noun,

[298] See Buzan, *The Making of Global Society*, 23.

[299] *Ibid*, 22.

pivot refers to "the central point, pin, or shaft on which a mechanism turns or oscillates".[300] As a verb, pivot means "to turn or balance on a central point".[301] This thesis uses the term in the latter form to describe the way clerical power pivots world politics. It uses the term in the former to describe how Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics through its reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. Before elaborating further, it is necessary to distinguish this thesis' use of pivot from Mackinder's deeply problematic 'pivot state' theory.

The term 'pivot states' was introduced in Mackinder's 1904 article "The Geographical Pivot of History".[302] Mackinder's understanding of the term denotes the epicentre or centre of gravity around which political affairs rotate. For Mackinder, the pivot of Central and Eastern Europe was to be the new battleground between a rising Asia on the one hand and a defensive Europe, particularly Western Europe, on the other. The thesis uses the term in a way that is different from the 'pivot states' concept.[303] It differs in three key ways. First, it examines 'pivot cities' rather than nation-states as methodological units. Pivot is utilised in a descriptively stipulative sense which implies agential and generative power in world politics, as opposed existing geopolitical connotations. Second, and associated, this thesis takes literally the linguistic verb

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[300] "Pivot, noun", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[301] "Pivot, verb", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[302] Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History".

[303] Several scholars used the term following Mackinder. See Tim Sweijs, Willem Theo Oosterveld, Emily Knowles and Menno Schellekens, "Why are Pivot States so Pivotal? The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security", *The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies* (2014): 1-51. Ian Bremmer reinterpreted the term in 2012 to describe "a country that is not overly reliant on any one such major power, and can instead diversify between multiple powers, from a security and economic perspective". See "Interview: Ian Bremmer on Asia's Place in a G-Zero World", *Asia Society*, 19 June 2014, https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/interview-ian-bremmer-asias-place-g-zero-world; It is also used in foreign policy, for example, in reference to US President Barack Obama's 'pivot to Asia'. See, David Shambaugh, "Assessing the US "Pivot" to Asia", *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7:2 (2013): 10-19. This thesis' stipulative use of pivot is entirely unrelated to these lexical understandings.

and noun definitions of pivot.[304] That is, that Karbalāʾ is a central point of Shīʿīsm in world politics, and that Najaf's clerical authority can turn or balance the axes of international order through advocacy. Last and most importantly, this thesis rejects Mackinder's deeply problematic association of social Darwinism, racial politics and geography.[305]

In the case of Karbalāʾ, it is a pivot (noun) in world politics through its reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. The pivot is generative and has two main sources of power: productive ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces, and productive ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies. Karbalāʾs spatial source of power is expressed through the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage and how its various spots, spaces and places related to the historical events of Karbalāʾ reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. The second source of power is expressed in various ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies, informing Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus'. Collectively, these sources reproduce collective Shi'i identity and construct Karbalāʾ as a generative pivot in world politics.

Pivot in the context of Najaf takes the verb use to describe how it pivots world politics. This use of the term pivot implies an active or agential form of power, demonstrated through the historical trajectory of Najaf's clerical authority and its interactions with world politics. This temporal dimension of power reveals how the clerical authority pivots world politics using various forms of advocacy. This advocacy takes shape in two key forms: direct advocacy to

[304] From the Oxford English Dictionary.

[305] See Gerry Kearns, "The Political Pivot of Geography", *The Geographical Journal* 170:4 (2004): 337-346; Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

followers, and advocacy aimed at international audiences. These forms of advocacy cut across and between different levels of world politics at different times. Because this thesis focuses on shrine cities in world politics, the majority of clerical advocacy examined is at the interpolity level. However, Najaf's clerical authority derives a large degree of its legitimacy from the interhuman level, and advocates at the transnational level on inter-sect, inter-faith, and intra-faith issues, to followers and international audiences.

The clerical power pivot is temporal, rendering its relative salience an empirical question. The clerical authority's ability to pivot world politics was deeply constrained by Saddam Hussein's authoritarian repression of the *ḥawza*. The *ḥawza* regained its influential role in society after the US-led invasion and arguably wielded more influence than it did before Baʿathist Iraq. This is because the US-led invasion decimated the capacities of Iraq's institutional state structures, leaving a vacuum in virtually all aspects of society. As established in Chapter One, Najaf exercised considerable clerical authority in the 17th and 18th century. It maintained institutional autonomy and utilised great power competition to sustain this influence. Although this influence was considerable, it does not compare with the *ḥawza*'s influence post-2003.

Some pivots are more salient than others. Collective identity is relatively salient in Najaf, where the shrine of Imām Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is located and the annual Arbaʿeen pilgrimage takes place. However, collective identity alone does not construct Najaf as a pivot in world politics. It is the enduring influence of Najaf's *ḥawza* and its clerical authority which pivots world politics, making clerical power the most salient pivot in Najaf. It is important to note that Shīʿī clerics only gained the ability to issue jihād *fatwās* following the consolidation of *neo-uṣūlīsm* in the 18th century.

Prior to Najaf emergence as the primary centre of Shīʿī learning and authority, Karbalāʾ briefly experienced a period of clerical authority in the early 18th century. However, it was never the epicentre of Shīʿī authority, as several other centres of Shīʿī learning and scholarship emerged throughout Safavid Iran including, notably, Isfahan and Tabriz. Despite this, Karbalāʾ remains a significant pivot in world politics due to the salience of collective identity the city reproduces. The events of ʿĀshūrāʾ created a blueprint for collective Shīʿī memory and identity reproduction in Karbalāʾ which began almost immediately after the 680 Battle of Karbalāʾ. The continued evolution of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented practices and rituals associated with the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ constructs the city as a deeply historical pivot in world politics. Having established the use of pivot in this thesis, the following section elaborates on the temporal approach to Najaf.

Temporality: Between History and IR

The enduring epistemological and methodological differences dividing History and IR has prompted a number of disciplinary debates. Lawson points out that scholars such as Elman and Elman argue explicitly that political science uses history for theory testing, whereas historians see theory-building and testing as secondary.[306] The authors unambiguously declare:

> Political scientists are not historians, nor should they be. There are real and enduring epistemological and methodological differences that divide the two groups, and there is great value in recognising, maintaining and honouring these distinctions.[307]

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[306] Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

[307] *Ibid*, 35.

Lawson questions the construction of the divide outlined above, contending that "the eternal divide is more imagined than real".[308] IR necessarily uses history in a variety of ways. History can be problematic when treated simply as scripture or code finding material. Therefore, Lawson underscores the importance of treating history contextually "as cause and chance" as opposed to cause or chance.[309] Describing eventfulness in the context of IR, Lawson notes:

> This form of research lends itself to the study of how rhetorical strategic frame events, enabling some policy avenues and closing down others, or how transnational religious networks mobilize around events in order to disrupt modes of rule and reconstruct others.[310]

The case studies used in this thesis draw on transnational Shīʿī networks concentrated at Najaf's *ḥawza*. Temporality is useful for examining Najaf's *ḥawza* because it contested Iraqi sovereignty against British colonialism in the 20th century and American imperialism – real and perceived – in the 21st century. As the thesis will demonstrate, Najaf's *ḥawza* institution houses a high concentration of *marjaʿiyya* figures, whose *fatwās*, because of their popularity and influence, often have a significant impact across the Shīʿī world. Conditioning these edicts, however, are factors such as institutional responsibility, extraneous circumstances, and local context. Hence the need to understand these events within their temporal contexts.

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[308] George Lawson, "The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations* 18:2 (2012): 203-226.

[309] *Ibid*, 210.

[310] *Ibid*, 217.

Temporality and The Clerical Power Pivot in Najaf

Temporality presents itself as a useful tool for understanding the significance of Shīʿī shrine cities in IR and world history. Temporality has gained recent recognition as a useful lens in IR, as critical traditions of the field emphasise that contingency, context, and indeterminacy are inevitable parts of socio-political life.[311] Despite its promise, practitioners note that temporality remains largely underutilised in mainstream IR.[312] Hutchings reminds us that "time, as a category through which our experience of, and action in, the world is organized, has complex and multiple meanings".[313] World politics many concepts of time, which Hutchings argues "shapes narratives of political time", and this concept is particularly useful for understanding Najaf's religious authority in the broader context of international politics.[314] The case studies used in this thesis trace how Najaf's sacred authority shaped and were shaped by social structures across two periods. Ultimately, historical sociology offers a valuable perspective for advancing traditional understandings in IR.[315]

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[311] Andrew Hom, Christopher Mcintosh, Alisdair McKay and Liam Stockdale, eds., *Time, Temporality and Global Politics* (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2016); Andrew Hom, "Silent Order: the Temporal Turn in Critical International Relations", *Millennium* 46:3 (2018): 303-330; Benedikt Franz, "Narrative Time and International Relations", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25 (2022): 761-783; Hidemi Suganami, "Narrative Explanation and International Relations: Back to Basics", *Millennium* 37:2 (2008): 327-356; Alexander Spencer, *Romantic Narratives in International Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Ty Soloman, "Time and Subjectivity in World Politics", *International Studies Quarterly* 58:4 (2014): 671-681; Tom Lundborg, *Politics of the Event: Time, Movement and Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2013); Tim Büthe, "Taking Temporality Seriously: Modelling History and the Use of Narratives as Evidence", *American Political Science Review* 96:3 (2002): 481-493.

[312] Hutchings, "Happy Anniversary", 83; Gallois, *Time, Religion, and History*; Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*.

[313] Hutchings, *Time and World Politics*, 5.

[314] *Ibid*.

[315] The works of scholars such as Hobden, Hobson, Tilly, Mann and Skocpol demonstrate how historical sociology can provide historically rich insights without discarding the power of structural explanations. See for instance, Stephen Hobden, "Can Historical Sociology Be Critical?", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 24:3 (1999): 391-413; John M. Hobson, "What's at Stake in 'Bringing Historical Sociology *Back* into International Relations'? Transcending 'Chronofetishism' and 'Tempocentrism' in International

To understand clerical authority in world politics, temporality is a valuable tool that emphasises the importance of chronology, continuity and change. It allows one to explore origins and historical processes by examining what happened, when and why, while also placing events in their historical context. By avoiding anachronism and presentism, it acknowledges that events are shaped by their historical circumstances rather than being transhistorical or timeless. Ultimately, temporality emphasises that history is an ongoing process shaped by time.

The Temporal Dimension of IR

As mentioned earlier, this thesis uses Hom's temporal approach to IR, which he describes narrative emplotment as "reflexive realism".[316] Emplotment, according to Hom, is the "process of selecting elements of experience and drawing them together in an intelligible whole, informed by some theme and unfolding durative series".[317] Emplotment functions through its synoptic theme.[318] The synoptic theme of this thesis' case studies is the clerical authority's advocacy and its impact on world politics, whereas the durative series is Iraq's pursuit of self-determination. Hom notes that emplotment requires standards of completeness and appropriateness: that "all necessary elements are included, and all included elements are

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Relations", in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds. Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3-41; Charles Tilly, *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties* (New York: Routledge, 2005); George Lawson, "The Promise of Historical Sociology in International Relations", *International Studies Review* 8:3 (2006): 397-423.

[316] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 229.

[317] *Ibid*, 87

[318] In Hom's words, the synoptic theme integrates and coordinates multiple "change continua using the plot's central theme or lesson as the standard of synthesis". *Ibid*.

useful".[319] Developments in world politics and Iraq's political field constitute necessary elements whereas instances of clerical advocacy constitute useful elements. Ultimately, narrative temporalities refer to the collective narration of the timing of international political conduct.[320] Utilising overarching frames of reference, creative synthesis is employed to establish relationships between events, processes, and people in complex and dynamic contexts.[321] As a result, coherent plots synthesise heterogenous experiences into a meaningful series.[322]

Hom sets two criteria for successful emplotment. First, that the plot sets an "an intelligible problem requiring action to realise its essential tension. It is crucial that the overall plot and its component parts be well integrated and coordinated".[323] Second, that the story's "components cohere meaningfully" and advance "an intelligible series that is also a model of concordance".[324] This establishes a plot that is both "enactable" and "normative".[325] In doing so, it organises disparate and incongruous change processes into a coherent story based on the synoptic theme. Judgement of this synoptic theme facilitates the subsequent devices: creative filtration, experiential cleavage, and concordant discordance.[326]

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[319] *Ibid*, 96.

[320] *Ibid*, 82.

[321] *Ibid*, 75.

[322] *Ibid*, 85.

[323] *Ibid*, 87

[324] *Ibid*, 96; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 96.

[325] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 88.

[326] *Ibid*, 91.

Synoptic judgement facilitates creative filtration which determines which happenings, actors, and information are relevant or extraneous to the plot.[327] Synoptic judgement creatively filtrates specific information from wider experiences to ensure the narrative coheres to the elements related to the synopsis of one another.[328] In this case, clerical advocacy is the specific information while the imperial imposition of order on Iraq's political field represents the wider experience. Experiential cleavage and creative filtration work hand in hand to drastically reduce the amount of information that needs to be included in the plot. Creative filtration identifies and isolates relevant changes, whereas experiential cleaving limits them from extending indefinitely.[329] This is done to provide the plot with a "peculiar sort of unity-in-multiplicity" and more specifically a "temporal unity" or "durative present".[330] As Hom observes, "We cleave experience by reference to the synoptic standard, which determines when the story must begin and end in order to synthesize all its relevant elements in a way that realizes its key lesson".[331] Therefore, the case studies in this thesis provide a sufficient sense of temporal unity to two critical periods of Iraq's history in world politics.

The synoptic theme of clerical advocacy in world politics "provides an idea of how disparate experiences might become components of a coherent whole".[332] Synoptic judgement involves

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[327] By reducing the quantity of data, creative filtration manages complexity. *Ibid*, 92.

[328] Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 63; *Ibid*, 93.

[329] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 93.

[330] *Ibid*.

[331] *Ibid*, 94.

[332] *Ibid*, 91.

configuring various "circumstances, goals, interactions, and unintended results", as Hom puts it, into a coherent series from beginning to conclusion.[333] Circumstances examined throughout this thesis include events such as WWI and the lead up to the establishment of the British Mandate, and the evolution of Iraq's political field. Goals are oriented around external imperial ambitions, and internal pursuits for international recognition and self-determination. Interactions are characterised by imperial impositions of order and consequent instances of clerical advocacy. For example, the marginalisation of the clerical authority in the 20th century, and the paradox of clerical advocacy in the 21st century constitute unintended results. Hom notes that "the happenings we take in and use to compose a temporally unified plot come from prior interpretive configurations, which only resolve as such against some broader theme".[334]

The clerical authority's advocacy and its impact on world politics is the synoptic theme of this thesis' case studies. As noted, synoptic judgement configures disparate experiences into components of a coherent whole.[335] This involves combining various circumstances such as WWI, the US-led invasion, and Iraq's political field, with various goals such as imperialism and self-determination, interactions such as the imposition of order and consequent advocacy, and unintended results such as the marginalisation of the clerical authority in the 20th century and the paradox of clerical authority in the 21st century. Collectively, this synoptic process canvasses the core theme as both embedded and scalable within a coherent narrative. The construction of this coherent narrative hinges on creative filtration and experiential cleaving.

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[333] *Ibid*. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 41.

[334] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 91.

[335] *Ibid*, 91.

Creative filtration manages complexity by reducing the quantity of data.[336] It also functions in determining which happenings, actors and information are relevant or irrelevant to the plot. This thesis concentrates on happenings in world politics such as international diplomatic developments and associated local developments in Iraq. International diplomatic developments include the outbreak of WWI, Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech, the Paris Peace Conference and the establishment of the Mandate System. Local developments include the 1918 Najaf Uprisings, the Iraqi Referendum, and the 1920 Revolt. It focuses on key actors such as al-Yazdī, al-Shirāzī, Gertrude Bell, Arnold Wilson, Percy Cox, Captain W.M Marshall and Woodrow Wilson. Lastly, it focuses on key information such as clerical advocacy, including *fatwās* and clerical engagement with Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech. This information is focalised through experiential cleaving which limits relevant changes from extending indefinitely. This is done to achieve a sense of "temporal unity" or "durative present".[337] The leads to the final timing device: concordant discordance.

According to Hom, "Discordant happenings animate the narrative driver which renders them concordant by showing how they are actually a necessary origin, a causal or constitutive plot driver, or an unsurprising outcome in light of the theme".[338] Confounding events such as the advocacy of Najaf's clerical authority become productive links to the broader local and international political developments animating the synoptic theme. Hom notes that,

[336] *Ibid*, 92.

[337] *Ibid*, 93.

[338] *Ibid*.

"Concordant discordance works in the first instance, as a poetic rather than a practical resolution. It offers an aesthetic promissory note rather than a decisive inoculation against disharmony".[339] Viewing the clerical authority's advocacy in world politics through this lens, it becomes clear that "social processes have distinctly temporal dimensions that matter a great deal".[340] This provides a creative synthesis which bridges process sociology, narratology, and historical IR to illuminate complex socio-political phenomena for a richer understanding of international political conduct.

Temporal Context and Distance

Temporal context is significant because it not only helps describe the outcomes of actors' actions and inaction, but also the broader context conditioning events. Kadhum notes that temporality "can aid our understanding of actors' subjective interpretations of events and provide us with a temporal context in which to situate their motivations, shifting identities and political actions".[341] The temporal context of Iraq's post-2003 political landscape has been the topic of much debate. Kadhum argues that the pre-2003 temporal context was characterised by "Shiʿa redemption, vindication, and a rise in Shiʿa political consciousness".[342] This context shifted in the post-2005 period, to the, "'The Shiʿa Moment' A time to consolidate Shiʿa power through Shi'a political identity and mass support".[343] In the post-2014 period, the temporal

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[339] *Ibid*, 95.

[340] Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.

[341] Oula Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality meet: Shi'a Political Transnationalism over Time and its Relationship to the Iraqi State", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49:2 (September 2020): 1-18, 4.

[342] *Ibid*, 7-8.

[343] *Ibid*, 8-9.

context shifted again, characterised by, "Existential crisis, Shiʿa victimisation and disillusionment with Shi'a-centric statebuilding".[344] These temporal categories are not beyond question, of course, but highlight how different narrative temporalities are viewed from different perspectives.

Dodge and Mansour take a different approach which focuses on the place of sectarianisation and de-sectarianisation in Iraq's political field following the 2003 US invasion.[345] The authors echo Brubaker's argument that identities are "induced – by political fields of particular kinds".[346] This emphasises how relational categories of practice order society. They note that sectarianism dominated Iraq's political landscape between 2003-2005. After 2005, they observe a "struggle in Iraq's political field between those arguing for a sectarian vision and those making the case for what Valbørn labels "post-sectarianism".[347] That is, treating sectarian categories as "banal", accepted but non-contentious units of societal organization".[348] Kadhum's approach uses temporality to examine how diaspora mobilisation patterns change in line with opportunities and threats "in the homeland structure", whereas Dodge and Mansour assess Iraq's shifting political field and the shifting place of sectarianisation in political

[344] *Ibid*, 10-11.

[345] Toby Dodge and Renad Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectariaization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18:1 (2020): 58-69.

[346] *Ibid*, 59; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.

[347] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectariaization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field", 59.

[348] Morten Valbjørn, "What do We Talk About When We Talk about Anti/Counter/Multi/Post/De/Trans-sectarianism – and How to Go About It?" 'The Challenges of Transnational Movements & Inclusionary States in the MENA' at the Lebanese American University of Beirut, 19 September 2019.

discourse.[349] Both approaches prove useful for this thesis' synoptic theme of clerical advocacy during these confounding happenings.

Temporal distance is related to temporal context. According to Decker, "temporal distance is a critical concept in historical research that describes how the past is portrayed in terms of present-day concerns".[350] In a similar fashion, temporal distance can assist in contextualising historical events with the benefit of hindsight, to consider factors not instantly apparent. Moaddel's critical reconsideration of the 1891 Tobacco *fatwā* and its consequences, is an example of temporal distance which emphasises the connection between merchant class interests and religious opposition.[351] Moaddel problematises the interpretation of the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* by Keddie and Algar, arguing that previous understandings of the protest movement treated the *ʿulamā'* as a homogenous category.[352] By contrast, Moaddel treats Shīʿīsm and the *ʿulamā'* as two analytically distinct categories.[353] The *ʿulamā'* are an interest group. Shīʿīsm, on the other hand, is neither the ideology of the *ʿulamā'* nor of a particular class such as the merchants. Shīʿī Islam constituted a discourse that shaped the political action of the merchants and enhanced their capacity to act in their mobilisation efforts against the state and the

[349] Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet"; Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectariaization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field".

[350] Stephanie Decker, "Introducing the Eventful Temporality of Historical Research into International Business", *Journal of World Business* 57:6 (October 2022): 1-13, 6.

[351] Mansoor Moaddel, "Shiʿi Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892", *Sociological Forum* 7:3 (September 1992): 447-468.

[352] Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Nikkie Keddie, "The Roots of the ʿulamā's Power in Modern Iran", in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East Since 1500*, ed. Nikkie Keddie (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 211-229.

[353] Moaddel, "Shiʿi Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892".

British.[354] Having established temporal context and distance, the following section outlines aspects of *fatwā* mobilisation in light of temporality.

Fatwā Mobilisation and Temporality

Temporality can assist in understanding relations between the past, present, and future by considering the experiences and thoughts of actors. This thesis uses temporality to highlight the structural differences between the 1891 tobacco *fatwā* issued by Grand Ayatollah Mirza Shirāzī and the defensive jihād *fatwā* issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī in 2014 to protect Iraq and its sacred places. Similarly, the temporal distance between the unanswered telegram Mirza Taqī al-Shirāzī and Fath Allāh Gharawī Isfahānī sent to US President Woodrow Wilson in 1919, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's 2014 meeting with Grand Ayatollah Sistānī in Najaf.

The significance of temporality between these contrasting events is stark in two ways. First, the technological advancements stemming from modernity drastically enhanced the possible methods of communication such as telegrams and physical meetings, otherwise known as "interaction capacity". Buzan and Little note: "Interaction capacity focuses on the system-wide capability of units to maintain contact with each other by moving goods, people and information around the system".[355] Innovations of the 20th century such as the printing press

[354] *Ibid*.

[355] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

enhanced the interaction capacity of *fatwās*. Likewise, innovations such as mobile phones and the internet around the advent the 21st century qualitatively enhanced *fatwā* transmission.

The second aspect of temporal significance is the relative inclusivity of international order between these events. The structure of international relations in the 20th century was highly racialised. Therefore, the Fourteen points President Wilson delivered to the League of Nations were not intended for non-White populations seeking self-determination. A century later, however, UN Secretary General Moon would remark: "He [Sistānī] is a man of the deepest wisdom and tolerance. He is an inspiration and a role model for his many followers in Iraq and beyond".[356]

The above examples of temporal distance suggest a linearly positive trajectory of the clerical authority in world politics. Technological advancements enhanced its ability to disperse its advocacy, and international audiences exhibited great awareness of the clerical authority's important role in Iraqi society. However, this only portrays part of the story. Despite these advancements, the clerical authority's advocacy in the 21st century unintentionally contributed to the increased salience of sectarian identities in Iraq's post-invasion political field. In some cases, the clerical authority's advocacy fell on deaf ears. In other cases, its advocacy inadvertently alienated segments of Iraqi society, legitimised sectarian political actors, and contributed to Iran's regional strategic ambitions. This concordant discordance contrasts the clerical authority's advocacy in the 20th century, where it unified Iraq's stratified society under

[356] "Remarks to Press in Najaf, Iraq – Ban Ki-Moon" *United Nations – Secretary-General*, 24 July 2014, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2014-07-24/remarks-press-najaf-iraq.

the banner of shared identity and anti-colonial sentiment. In addition to these temporal differences, a temporal approach also reveals certain patterns between the religious authority's response to the British occupation in the 20th century and the US-led invasion in the 21st century.

Temporal Patterns

Across various temporal contexts, a set of patterns relating to institutional responsibility, advocacy through *fatwās*, engagement with international society, and rejection of imperialism are characteristic. Institutional responsibility for the longevity of the *ḥawza* priorities the long-term objectives of the *ḥawza*, rather than short-term priorities relating to domestic everyday politics. This helps clarify clerical advocacy beyond binary concepts such as activism and quietism. Another similarity across these temporalities is the religious authority's willingness to seek dialogue with institutions of international society such as the League of Nations and the UN, while rejecting engagement with occupying forces. For example, Chapter Three examines how al-Yazdī reluctantly entertained limited engagements with British emissaries as they sought to establish a Mandate in Iraq. Similarly, Chapter Four shows how religious leaders were not interested in dialogue with the US following the 2003 invasion, opting instead for international diplomacy and UN engagement. Despite considerable differences across these periods, many enduring patterns are evident.

The context in which *fatwās* are issued is intimately linked to the broader temporality of international order. Pivots of clerical power are understood through the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy, beginning with the 1891 Tobacco Protest and concluding with the 2014 defensive *jihād fatwā*. The author and mode of advocacy (e.g., *bayan* or *fatwā*) are examined

in this thesis along with the event/issue in question and the domain of world politics most closely implicated. Table 1 lists the religious edicts examined and the most impacted domain of world politics. Because the durative series of this thesis concentrates on Najaf's clerical advocacy in world politics during 'critical temporalities', creative filtration naturally privileges the interpolity domain.

Event Date	Author	*Fatwā*/ Bayan	Event/Issue	Domain/Order
December 1891	Mirza Al-Shirāzī	Tobacco *Fatwā*	British Tobacco Monopoly	Interpolity
1911	Al-Yazdi	*Fatwā*	Italian Colony in Libya + Russian/ British invasion of Iran.	Interpolity
1911	Al-Shirāzī	*Fatwā*	Resist Soviet Aggression in Iran.	Interpolity
December 1914	Al-Yazdi al-Isfahani al-Shirāzī	Jihād *Fatwā*	British Occupation Iraq	Interpolity
1917	Al-Yazdi al-Isfahani	Letter to King George V	Protection of holy sites	Inter-human

	al-Shirāzī			
23 January 1919	Al-Shirāzī	Election *Fatwā*	Prohibition of non-Muslim leader	Interpolity
March 1920	Taqī al-Shirāzī	*Fatwā*	Resist British Aggression	Interpolity
June 2003	Sistānī	Iraqi Constitution Referendum	Post-Invasion Iraq's Political Sphere	Interpolity
March 2004	Sistānī	*Bayan* on TAL	TAL would enshrine ethnosectarian division in Iraqi society.	Interpolity
June 2004	Sistānī	Letter to the United Nations	Unconstitutional Parliamentary Composition	Interpolity Transnational
May 2004	Sistānī	One-person, one-vote *Fatwā*	U.S. Municipal Caucus Proposal	Interpolity
August 2004	Sistānī	*Bayan*	promoting inter-faith harmony following attacks	Inter-human

			on Christian Churches	
April 2005	Sistānī	Condolence bayan for Pope John Paul II	Inter-faith Solidarity	Inter-human Transnational
June 2005	Sistānī	Democracy *Fatwā*	Iraqi Reconstruction	Interpolity
August 2005	Sistānī	Neutrality Bayan	Iraqi Federalism Question	Interpolity
June 2006	Al-Hakim Al-Najafi	*Fatwā*	Imām ʿAlī Shrine Attack	Interpolity Interhuman
June 2006	Sistānī	Bayan	Sectarian Violence in Iraq	Interpolity Inter-human
June 2014	Sistānī	Jihād *Fatwā*	ISIS	Interpolity Interhuman

Table 1 – Clerical Encounters with World Order

The Logic of the Institution: The Institutional Responsibility of Najaf's Clerical Class

Many scholarly treatises on clerical advocacy suffer from a tendency to over-generalise between 'activist' and 'quietist' binaries. This study, however, will seek to avoid this by

introducing Alshamary's theory on the institutional responsibility of Iraq's *ḥawza*.[357] This research represents a comprehensive and meaningful investigation into the vastly underexamined phenomena of Najaf's *ḥawza* and its significance in world politics. Alshamary offers a methodically detailed analysis on the institutional responsibility of Najaf's *ḥawza* in the context of clerical participation in protest movements from 1917-2020.[358] While Alshamary's study is isolated to clerical participation in protest movements, the theory of institutional responsibility enriches our understanding of clerical advocacy and world politics. Alshamary's theory offers a third way for understanding clerical Shīʿī advocacy and non-advocacy beyond rational-actor models and ideological frameworks.[359] She does so by identifying two crucial factors that influence the political involvement of the Iraqi *ḥawza*: authority and responsibility. In her words:

> authority increases clerical capacity for enacting and supporting protests. Institutional responsibility is the obligation a cleric feels towards protecting the religious establishment and ensuring its well-being and perpetuation. A sense of institutional responsibility reduces clerical motivations for enacting and supporting protests.[360]

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[357] See Anne Phillips, "What's Wrong with Essentialism?", *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 11:1 (2010): 47-60.

[358] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests".

[359] For ideological understandings, see Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, *Psychoanalytic Sociology: Contributions to Historical Phenomena and Collective Behavior* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Gerald M. Platt and Rhys H. Williams, "Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Segregationists' Ideologies", *Sociological Theory* 20:2 (2002): 328-359. For rational-actor understandings, see Raymond Boudon, "Ordinary Rationality: The Core of Analytical Sociology" in *Analytical Sociology and Social Mechanisms*, ed. Pierre Demeulenaere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33-49; Steven Finkel, Edward Muller and Karl-Dieter Opp, "Personal Influence, Collective Rationality, and Mass Political Action", *American Political Science Review* 83:4 (1989): 885-903; For a recent study on the limits of rational-actor models, see Mohamed Naimi, "The Limits of Rational Choice in the Sociology of Social Movements: The 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement in Morocco", *AlMuntaqa* 3:1 (May/June 2020): 52-69.

[360] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 8-9.

These factors also play a critical role in determining clerical advocacy in world politics. However, bureaucratisation of the religious system is a key structural variable which determines clerical authority and responsibility. Alshamary writes:

> the bureaucratization of the religious system holds the key to understanding whether responsibility for the perpetuation of the system is distributed widely or rests on the shoulders of just a few. In highly bureaucratized systems, characterized by standard operating procedures and rational-legal authority, clerics are rewarded for prioritizing allegiance to the institution itself. This gives each cleric a stake in perpetuating the system.[361]

In non-bureaucratised systems, such as the 20th century Iraqi *ḥawza*, the sense of responsibility for the perpetuation of the religious system lies at the top of the religious hierarchy. Therefore, elites have a higher sense of institutional responsibility than elites in bureaucratised systems, where it is dispersed throughout.[362] This study diverges from Alshamary's comprehensive study of institutional authority and responsibility to consider how Najaf's sacred authority pivots world politics through various modes of advocacy. Not all *fatwās* relate to protest movements in Iraq. However, institutional responsibility plays a significant role in clerical advocacy on other issues such as participation in Iraq's reconstruction period, political process, and promotion of inter-sect harmony. Therefore, this thesis illustrates how Alshamary's theory of institutional responsibility extends beyond protest movements to broader clerical advocacy. Alshamary's theory is useful because it analyses clerical participation in protests across various regime systems such as colonialism, authoritarianism, and democratisation. Ultimately, institutional responsibility is more consequential than ideological factors in determining clerical advocacy.

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[361] *Ibid*, 9.

[362] *Ibid*, 37.

The political orientation of Najaf's sacred authority is often represented as 'silent' or 'quietist'.[363] However, Chapter Three questions this perception by examining the clerical authority's engagement with world politics during the 1918 Siege of Najaf and lead up to the establishment of the British Mandate in 1920. This examination of the *ḥawza* as a religious system assists in contextualising the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy in world politics. It emphasises the importance of institutional responsibility over typical rational-actor oriented and ideological understandings of clerical engagement with political affairs. Having established the theoretical debates concerning Najaf's sacred authority, the following section outlines Karbalāʾs significance to world politics through the prism of collective identity.

The Spatiality of Collective Identity in Karbalāʾ

The spatial reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ can be understood in several ways. Within the realm of perspectival realism, the collective identity pivot is understood through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spatiality and ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies.[364] Cartography and spatiality are important yet underutilised tools in the study of IR.[365] Cultural

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[363] Denis McEoin, "Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imāmi Shiʿism", *British Society for Middle East Studies* 11:1 (1984): 18-27; Denis Hermann, "Political Quietism in Contemporary Shīʿīsm: A Study of the Styāsat-i mudun of the Shaykhī Kirmānī Master ʿAbd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī", *Studia Islamica* 109:4 (2014): 274-302.

[364] Massimi, *Perspectival Realism*.

[365] Lambach points out that in the *European Journal of International Relations* (EJIR) special issue on the "End of IR", Jackson and Nexon "omit any reference space, place or scale in their 'catalogue – or map – of the basic substances and processes that constitute world politics". See Lambach, "Space, Scale, and Global Politics", 283. See Patrick Jackon and Dan H. Nexon, "International theory in a Post-Paradigmatic Era: From Substantive Wagers to Scientific Ontologies", *European Journal of International Relations* 19:3 (2013): 546-565. Following this special issue, a handful of publications on spatiality have featured in the EJIR and elsewhere. See Beverly Loke and Catherine Owen, "Mapping Practices and Spatiality in IR Knowledge Production: From Detachment to Emancipation", *European Journal of International Relations* 28:1 (2022):

cartography is a useful approach for analysing the reproduction of collective identity, especially in landscapes that reflect and perpetuate historical narratives.[366] Weaver describes the potential of spatial orientations to IR as "heuristic devices designed to shed light on real world politics. No single orientation tells an immutable truth at the others expense, they offer complementary and competing imaginaries of the world".[367] This thesis' spatial orientation to IR utilises perspectival realism.

Perspectival realism emphasises how scientific representations are situated from a specific vantage point.[368] According to Massimi: "What is distinctive about perspectival representation is not so much that the representation is situated, but instead that the situatedness of the representation affects the representational content".[369] Therefore, perspectival realism is a valuable approach for examining collective identity in Karbalāʾ. With a focus on ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and places, the cartography used depicts an intentionally Shīʿī cartography of Karbalāʾ. Because maps are deliberately perspectival, they capture certain things while overlooking others. As Go notes, "There can be no "universal" cartographic knowledge of a

30-57; Daniel Drezner, "Power and International Relations: a Temporal View", *European Journal of International Relations* 27:1 (2020): 29-52; Goettlich, "The Rise of Linear Borders in World Politics"; Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Joanne Yao, "The Power of Geographical Imaginaries in the European International Order: Colonialism, the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, and Model International Organizations", *International Organization* (First view) 2022: 1-28; Jordan Branch and Kerry Goettlich, "Border and Boundaries: Making Visible what Divides", in *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*, eds. Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez and Halvard Leira (London: Routledge, 2021), 267-276.

[366] Examining historical narratives in Qing imperial China, Whiteman demonstrates how landscapes are accretive. See Stephen Whiteman, "From Upper Camp to Mountain Estate: Recovering Historical Narratives in Qing Imperial Landscapes", *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 33:4 (2013): 249-279.

[367] Weaver, Spatiality and World Politics", 23.

[368] Massimi, *Perspectival Realism*.

[369] *Ibid*, 34.

city because maps are perspectival, each map is necessarily partial and incomplete".[370] This spatial approach to collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ is perspectival in the sense that it draws on culturally situated scientific knowledge. As Massimi notes,

> Scientific representation (like cartographic representation) is always perspectival and indexical because it is always from a well-defined vantage point, i.e. that of the model employed for representing the target system.[371]

Chapters Five provides a situated representation of Karbalāʾ based on extended asynchronous digital-ethnographic interviews and an array of primary and secondary sources. It includes epistemically subjective data such as the location of Imām al-Ḥusayn encampment and its significance to ʿĀshūrāʾ. It also includes epistemically objective data such as diametrical specifications of Imām al-Ḥusayn's sanctuary. One example of this is the tomb of collective martyrs which is located just under five metres from the feet of ʿAlī, al-ʾAkbar's tomb. An example of epistemically subjective data is the al-Hāʿir 'sacred zone', which is an unmarked area of approximately 11.5 metres in all directions from Imām al-Ḥusayn's tomb.

Low describes places as "the spatial location of subjectivities, intersubjectivities, and identities".[372] One such example is the al-Hāʿir sacred zone. It does not have any distinguishable physical properties, but in Shīʿīsm denotes that no traveller is considered as a

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[370] Julian Go, "Race, Empire and Epistemic Exclusion: On the Structures of Sociological Thought", *Sociological Theory* 38:2 (June 2020): 79-100, 93.

[371] Michela Massimi, "Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96:2 (2016): 342-359, 349.

[372] Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (London: Routledge, 2016), 32.

stranger because the radius is the home of all believers.[373] This understanding is perspectival and cannot be proven or disproven, but it is considered robust when it comes from local stakeholders. Chapter Five provides objective data, such as physical representations, but the meaning and significance of these spaces is based on their historical significance in Shīʿī history, which is inter-subjective. The analysis in the chapter focuses on ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces, spots and places, providing a perspective that privileges their importance. Figure 5 shows how subjective and objective points of data are combined to create a cultural cartography of Karbalāʾ.

[373] Muḥammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, "A brief description of the Ḥusayni Hāir in Karbalāʾ", unpublished note 2021.

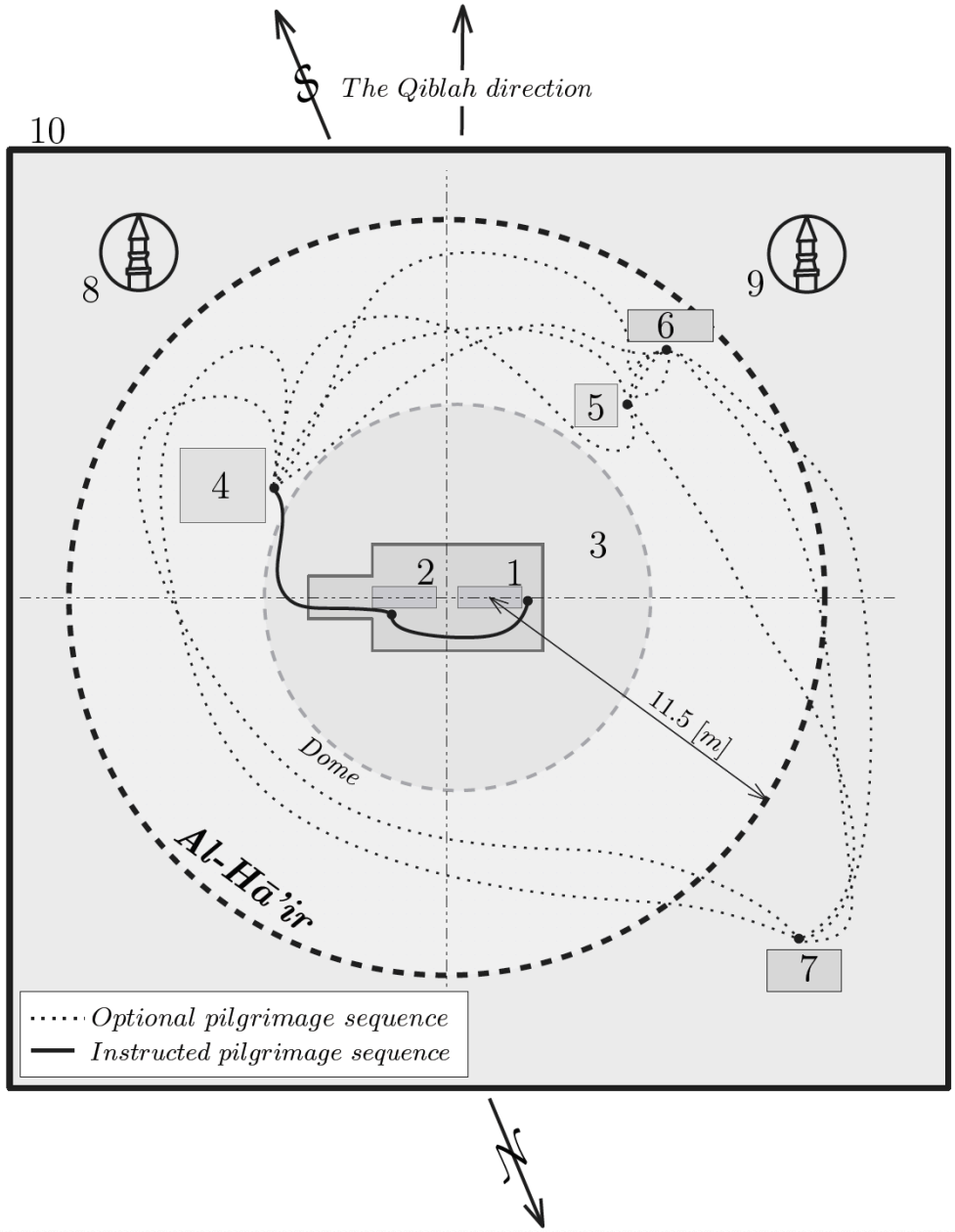

FIGURE 5 - EPISTEMICALLY SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE DATA: IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN'S SACRED SANCTUARY. ORIGINAL SOURCE.

This raises the question of the researcher's vantage point. The data is informed by interviews but ultimately organised from the perspective of the researcher. As Massimi writes,

> Philosophical discussion of perspectival representations have to start by acknowledging the role of the human agent not just as a spectator, but first and foremost as an architect in arranging lines of composition and creating in painstaking detail the perspectival effects of a 'window of reality'.[374]

The 'window of reality' represented portrays how Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented sacred spots, spaces and places reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. The various cartographic diagrams are informed by epistemic Shīʿī stakeholders and are intended to represent inferential blueprints for understanding the various elements reproducing collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ. Consultation with architectural stakeholders and Shīʿī intellectuals consolidates intersecting scientific perspectives and associated perspectival data-to-phenomena inferences. These empirics inform Karbalāʾs 'power of place'.

The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage: Karbalāʾs Power of Place

The power of place has been used in previous studies of the Islamic world. In the context of the 9th and 10th-century Islamic world, Antrim writes, "The discourse of place includes works that have been classified separately as world and regional geographies, literary anthologies, topographical histories, religious treatises, travelogues and poems".[375] Antrim uses this framework to describe the nature of "extratextual performances" in cities through cognitive, oral and physical acts "prompted by a text".[376] Karbalāʾ exemplifies this city-specific phenomenon of 'extratextual performance' through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented performative rituals, including pilgrimage, poetry, and ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented objects used during physical acts at sacred

[374] Massimi, *Perspectival Realism*, 33.

[375] Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 3.

[376] *Ibid*.

spaces. In Paasi words, "meanings of space and the territorial use of space are historically contingent, and their histories are closely interrelated".[377] The spatial approach is geared towards a cross-disciplinary understanding of Karbalāʾ, which gives weight to the significant granularities of the ʿĀshūrāʾ events, contributing to the city's assemblage of sites that reproduce collective transnational Shīʿī identity.

The cross-disciplinary approach bears a close resemblance to Antrim's study on the power of place in the early Islamic world. This study uses a variation of Antrim's procedure with the added variable of sacred and historically contingent places. Specifically, it traces the construction of Karbalāʾ and the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity to demonstrate the power of place through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and rituals. As Massey notes, space is "open ongoing production" which constitutes what Paasi describes as "important *processes* embedded in the production and reproduction of social relations on various scales".[378] Figure 6 illustrates this bounded territory which constitutes and reproduces these important social relations, otherwise known as Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage.[379]

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[377] Anssi Paasi, "Territory", in *A Companion to Political Geography*, eds. John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 109-122, 110.

[378] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 55; Anssi Paasi, "Bounded Spaces in a "Borderless World": Border Studies, Power and the Anatomy of Territory", *Journal of Power* 2:2 (2009): 213-234, 215.

[379] Figure 6.

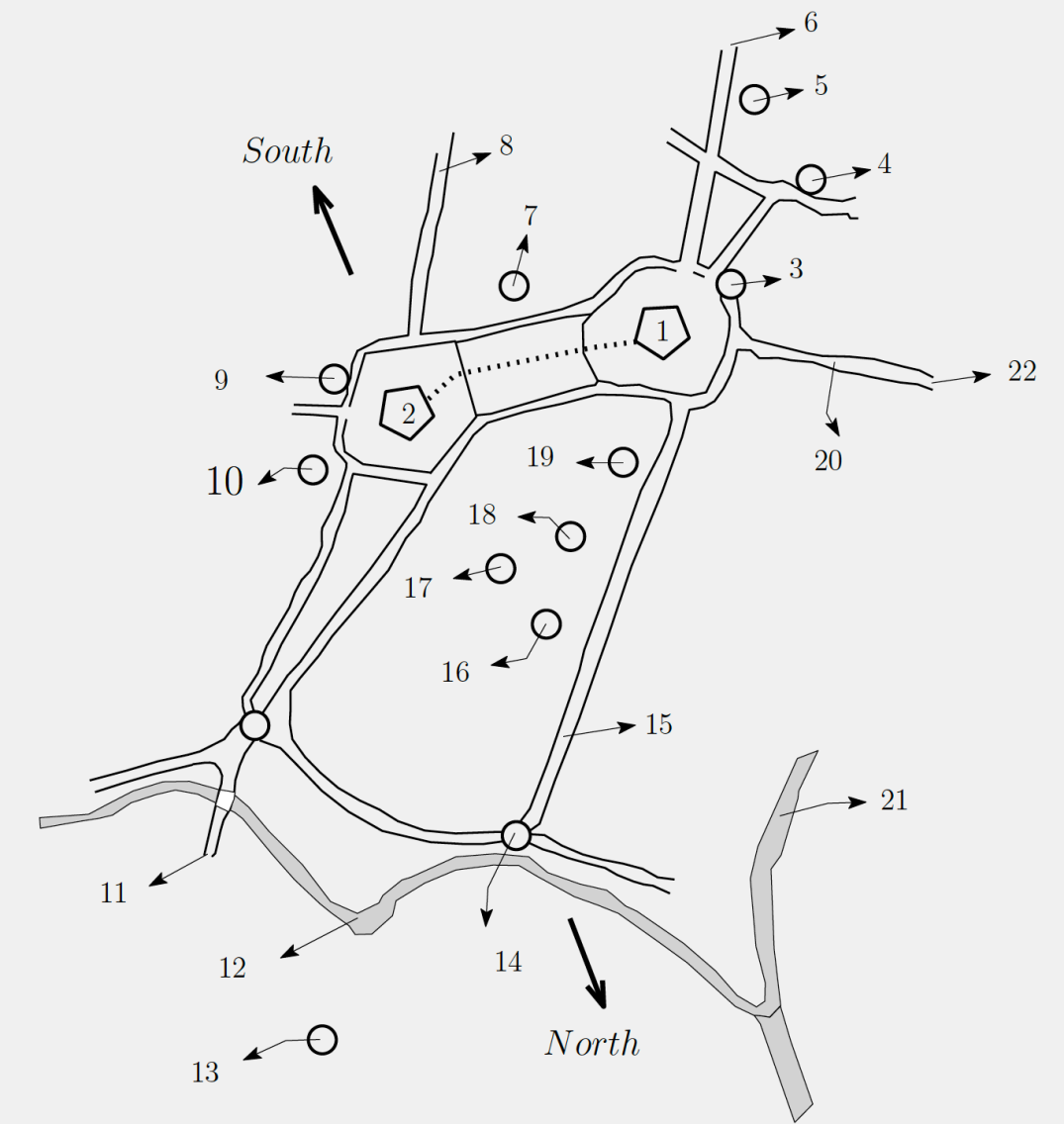

FIGURE 6 - THE ʿĀSHŪRĀʾ ASSEMBLAGE: A CULTURAL CARTOGRAPHY OF KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: ORIGINAL SOURCE, ADAPTED FROM SKETCH PROVIDED BY THE SHRINE OF IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN.

Advancing the 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'

The 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' has become a popular way of conceptualising Muharram rituals in social scientific scholarship. As noted, Fischer coined the phrase 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' as providing a "model for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live".[380] Describing

[380] Fischer, *Iran*, 21.

the Karbalāʾ Paradigm, Aghaie writes, "The Karbalā' narrative in turn, became the axis around which of history revolves for the Shīʿīs".[381] As Harvey reminds us, "every social formation constructs objective conceptions of space and time sufficient unto its own needs".[382] The Karbalāʾ Paradigm has been used to describe a variety of phenomena ranging from the martyrdom's narrational utilisation, various dramatisations, and also as a way of differentiating Shīʿī rituals or "modes of piety".[383] However, the concept is often posed in binary terms such as active and passive, modern and revolutionary, and traditional and salvific. Before the Iranian revolution, Ali Sharīʿati used the term in a slightly different way.

Sharīʿati presented two types of Shīʿīsm in his use of the Karbalāʾ narrative. The first was "pure, just, and populist Shīʿīsm of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib".[384] The second was "Safavid Shīʿīsm", which he characterised as a corrupt form of piety among the scholarly elite, the *ʿulamā'*, that focused more on ritual observance than on opposing corrupt regimes.[385] In 2013, Szanto questioned these dichotomous portrayals arguing that they "depoliticize salvation and desacralize revolution".[386] Drawing on fieldwork conducted in the Syrian shrine city of Sayyida Zaynab, Szanto demonstrates how modes of piety can be simultaneously revolutionary and salvific. Using the conceptions of *athara* (tradition) and *thara* (revolution), Szanto shows how

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[381] Aghaie, "Gender-coded Symbols and Public Religious Rituals in Post-Revolutionary Iran", 80.

[382] David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 8:3 (1990): 418-434, 419.

[383] Deeb, "Living ʿĀshūrāʾ in Lebanon"; Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*; Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*; Pinault, *The Shiʿites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim* Community; Ayoub*, Redemptive Suffering*; Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran*; Fischer, *Iran*; Hegland, "A Mixed Blessing".

[384] Szanto, "Beyond the Karbala Paradigm", 78.

[385] *Ibid*.

[386] *Ibid*.

both concepts materialise during mourning rituals, and in some ways, reflect the duality of mind and body through theoretical dogma and practical piety as affectively complementary. This thesis follows Szanto's analytic focus on affect rather than political effectiveness by introducing the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' as another way of thinking about the psychic, attitudinal and devotional aspects of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm beyond binaries and politicised conceptions. Rather than focusing on politicised applications of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm in worldly affairs, this thesis uses the Karbalāʾ Paradigm in a similar fashion to Fischer's original 1983 conception. Describing the Karbalāʾ Paradigm, Fischer writes:

> There are then, three parts to the notion of paradigm: (a) a story expandable to be all-inclusive of history, cosmology, and life's problems; (b) a background contrast against which the story is given heightened perceptual value: in this case, primarily Sunni conceptions, but other religions at times serve the same function; and (c) ritual or physical drama to embody the story and maintain high levels of emotional investment: the rituals of daily worship (prayer, purity rules, dietary rules); pilgrimage to the tombs of 'Ali in Najaf, Nusayn in Karbalāʾ, the other Imāms, and the hajj; preachments (rawda) mourning processions (ta'ziya), and passion plays of Muharram (shabih).[387]

This understanding of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm offers two complementary elements. First, the narrational aspects of the martyrdom story as expandable and all-inclusive of history, in many ways reflects the structure of a master-narrative. Second, the pietistic aspects of productive mourning-rituals and pilgrimage reflect the devotional elements of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm and its reproduction of collective identity. Collectively, this process describes how the martyrdom narrative is reinforced through rituals and prayers, which in turn contributes to its construction as a master narrative of collective identity.

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[387] Fischer, *Iran*, 27.

Several scholars have highlighted the significance of the Karbalāʾ narrative in Shīʿīsm as much more than just an isolated historical event.[388] Inloes argues that the Karbalāʾ narrative "functions as a mythos rather than as a history".[389] To support this point, Inloes uses Hylén's definition of myth as, "a narrative that is foundational to the worldview and identity of a group of people… [which] has nothing to do with whether the story is historically "factual" or "fictional", "true" or "false"".[390] This aligns closely with Fischer's conception of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm as a mnemonic for behaviour and temporality. Inloes also points out that Shīʿīsm constructs the Karbalāʾ narrative as universal and archetypal, rather than being limited to Shīʿī confessional concerns. By portraying the story as an example of the "hero's journey" Inloes argues:

> The Karbalāʾ narrative mimics an archetypal narrative structure innate to the human psyche. Because it is archetypal, it is universal; while some take it to be sectarian, it is not inherently such, although it does cement communal identity.[391]

This thesis supports Inloes' portrayal of the Karbalāʾ narrative as a story with universal features, capable of reproducing collective identity and thus constructing the city as a pivot in world politics. Incorporating the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage and its sites that evoke and inspire collective identity adds a material aspect to the subjective and intersubjective elements of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm. When combined with the acceptance of certain textual cosmologies and

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[388] Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative: Shīʿī Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s"; Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*; Fischer, *Iran*; Szanto, "Beyond the Karbala Paradigm"; Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*; Ayoub*, Redemptive Suffering*.

[389] Amina Inloes, "Joseph Campbell, Shiʿism, and the Karbala Narrative", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2022): 1-17.

[390] Torsten Hylén, "Myth, Ritual, and the Early Development of Shiite Identity", *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 6 (2018): 300-331. Quoted in Inloes, "Joseph Campbell, Shiʿism, and the Karbala Narrative", 5.

[391] Inloes, "Joseph Campbell, Shiʿism, and the Karbala Narrative", 6.

narratives such as *maqtals* and historiographies of ʿĀshūrāʾ, this can enhance the perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The mnemonic aspects of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented practices and rituals productively reproduce collective identity through shared rituals based on the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, which can function as a master narrative imbued with societal power and dominance. A similar example in the West is the way Judaeo-Christian theology functions in the United States in relation to the redemptive aspects of the so-called "American Dream".[392] Describing shrine cities in the 19th century, Litvak noted that the "mujtahid dream" played a similar role in mitigating class tensions in the ʿAtabāt' as the "American Dream" had in the United States.[393] In some ways, these alternative spatial imaginations represent what Paasi describes as "nonmobile and mobile social practices and discourses where borders – as processes, sets of sociocultural practices, symbols, institutions and networks – are produced, reproduced, and transcended".[394] Collectively, these sources produce and reproduce collective identity through practices, symbols, institutions and networks. Having established the spatial foundations of the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage and discontents concerning the 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm', the following section outlines the socio-institutional layers of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'.

Layers and Components of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'

Chapter Six introduces a taxonomy for understanding how the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' is enacted in everyday life, and how this reproduces collective Shīʿī identity. Mayer notes: "It is never the

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[392] Dan McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[393] Meir Litvak, "The Shiʿi ʿUlamā' of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, 1791-1904: A Sociopolitical Analysis" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1991), 414; Chapter Six further explores how the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative functions in this way.

[394] Anssi Paasi, "Border Studies Reanimated: Going Beyond the Territorial/Relational Divide", *Environment and Planning A* 44 (2012): 2302-2309, 2304.

spatial form that acts, but rather social actors, who, embedded in particular (multidimensional) spatial forms and making use of particular (multidimensional) spatial forms, act".[395] The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' has five spatial forms: 1) Textual sources, 2) Objects, 3) Performative sources, 4) Poetic rituals, and 5) Sacred spaces. It consists of three layers or levels. The first layer is defence, security and safety of the shrine. This requirement is foundational to the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' and thereby, permits the subsequent layers' manifestations. The second layer is the socio-institutional level. Once security of the shrine is established, an array of socio-institutional manifestations is possible. These components take shape through artistic, educational, financial, institutional, medical, scholarly, and ritualistic manifestations. These components manifest through educational schools, and institutions including *Ḥusayniyah* mosques and *mawkibs* (service tent). Medical and financial components consist of health clinics and religious monetary funds, endowments, and charities. Lastly, ritual manifestations take shape through local gatherings and commemorative proceedings. The final layer is the individual level. This level contains psychic intention and religio-devotional incentive which fosters an attitudinal religo-moral duty. Lambach reminds us that the construction of space is "not just through discourses and symbols, but also includes material factors since spatial constructions are never independent from physical geography, technology, and non-human agents".[396] Figure 7 depicts the implicative staircase whereby each layer is necessitated by the previous layer.[397]

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[395] Margit Mayer, "To What End Do We Theorize Sociospatial Relations", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (2008): 414-419, 416.

[396] Lambach, "Space, Scale, and Global Politics", 283-284,

[397] Chapter Six elaborates further on these socio-institutional manifestations.

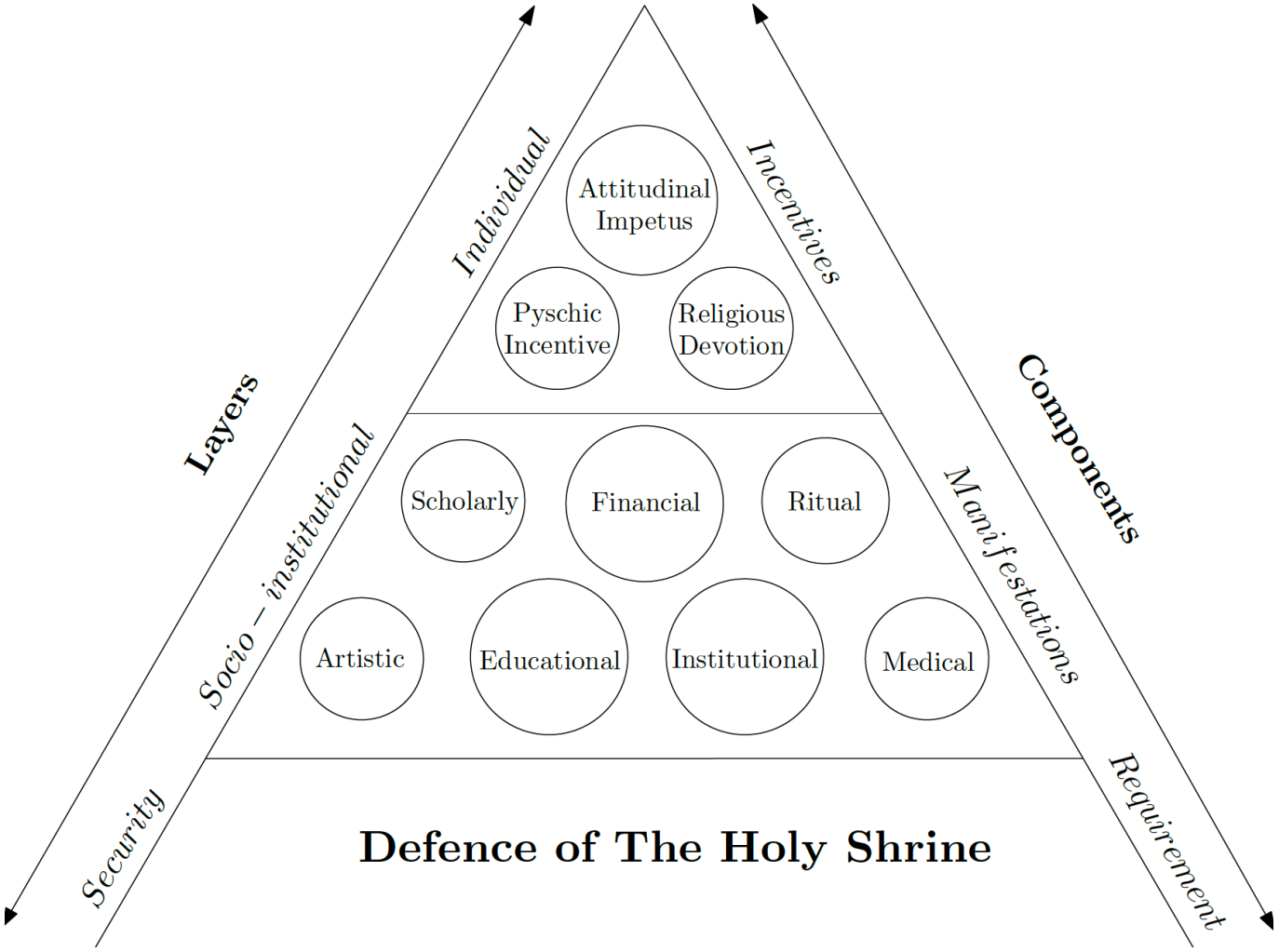

FIGURE 7 - LAYERS AND COMPONENTS OF THE 'ḤUSAYNI IMPETUS'. ORIGINAL SOURCE.

Recursive Cycle of Collective Identity Reproduction

Chapters Five and Six collectively outline the process between sacred spaces informing a 'power of place' and associated mnemonic rituals and practices reinforcing the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. Taken together, Figure 8 completes the process of Karbalāʾ as a sacred shrine city which: a) contains adjacent spaces of pilgrimage and ritual inspired by textual historiographies and narratives, b) enhances the perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ, and c) initiates a religio-moral duty in adoration, emulation and service for Imām al-Ḥusayn. The recursive cycle based on performed ritualisation, both intellectual and imaginative, represents a model for

behaviour and temporality which reproduces collective Shīʿī identity. Shifting the Karbalāʾ paradigm from an assemblage of discernible rituals and beliefs derived from the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, to factor the phenomenologically tangible and intangible sites and sources of collective Shīʿī identity, reveals the possibility of an ʿĀshūrāʾ-based religio-moral duty explicated in the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'. This conception of Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity challenges existing conceptions of the so-called Karbalāʾ Paradigm. It does so by instituting a recursive cycle of identity formation, inspired by, and reproduced through generative spatial elements of Karbalāʾ and productive ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and textual cosmologies.

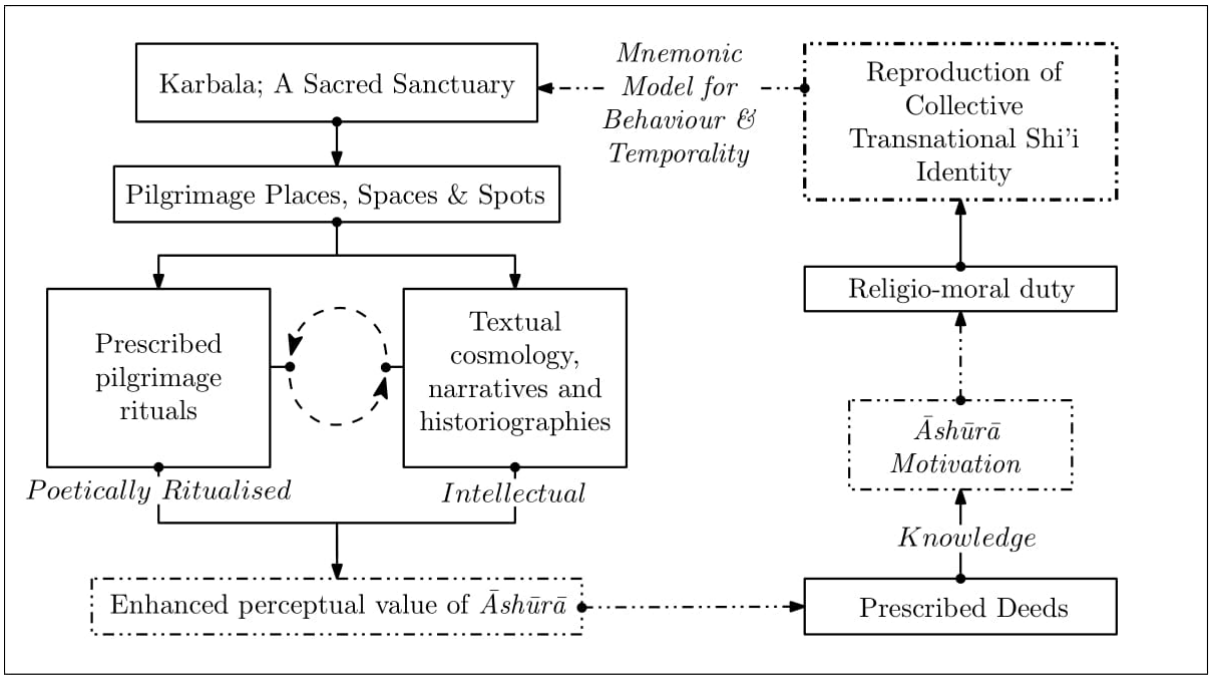

FIGURE 8 - RECURSIVE CYCLE OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY REPRODUCTION IN KARBALĀʾ. ORIGINAL SOURCE. OUTLINED IN CHAPTER SIX.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the temporal and spatial approaches used to examine the construction of Shīʿī shrines in world politics. The case studies of Najaf focus on the temporal context and actions of the religious leaders leading up to the establishment of the British Mandate in 1920 and following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. The Karbalāʾ chapters, on the other hand, utilise theories of the 'power of place' to explore the role of spatiality and sacred rituals in the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity and the construction of Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics. The 'ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage' illustrates how the connection between various sacred spots, spaces and places of ritual reproduce collective identity. The thesis argues that both temporal and spatial dimensions of power are essential in understanding how Shīʿī shrines pivot world politics.

Chapter Three: Resistance and Resilience: Najaf's Sacred Authority and its Advocacy for Self-Determination, 1911-1919

As discussed in Chapter One, the centre of Shīʿī learning in Iraq shifted from Karbalāʾ to Najaf in the nineteenth century. This chapter focuses on the critical temporality leading up to the establishment of the British Mandate (1914-1921). It argues that this period was critical because religious identity emerged as a unifying force in a region deeply divided along tribal lines. Iraq's stratified society was unified through common elements of religion, language, ethnicity, and anti-colonial sentiment. While notions of a 'mandate' system gained traction on the internationals stage in light of Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' speech and promotion of a 'League of Nations', intense developments played out at the local level between the clerical authority and their colonial occupiers. Clerical advocacy during this period enhanced the evolution of a Shīʿī religio-political identity capable of directing future nation-building aspirations.

This chapter is split into six sections, each focusing on different aspects of Najaf's history as a city of clerical authority. Section one provides a general overview of Najaf's history and examines the relationship between its clerical authority and its transnational educational system (*ḥawza*) to understand how and why *fatwās* can influence global politics. Section two looks at how colonial stereotypes of 'fanaticism' and 'irrationality' led to misunderstandings of Iraq's clerical authority by the British. Section three explores the theme of anti-colonial sentiment in *fatwās* in the lead up to WWI, including the 1918 Najaf uprisings and the formation of the League of the Islamic Awakening. It also discusses growing discourse around 'self-determination' and the 'mandate' system playing out at the Paris Peace Conference. Section four discusses the British plebiscite and the resulting mobilisation of clerics across Iraq,

culminating in Grand Ayatollah al-Shirāzī's 1919 *fatwā* against non-Muslim rule, and his attempts to engage with US President Woodrow Wilson in response to his 'Fourteen Points' speech at the League of Nations. Section five evaluates the clerical authority during the establishment of the British Mandate and how Najaf's clerical elite demonstrated institutional responsibility despite local anti-colonial grievances. The final section concludes by discussing the temporal limitations of self-determination in a racialised world order.

A Temporal Approach to 20th Century Clerical Advocacy

Aside from the following historical overview of Najaf, the chapter's temporal approach utilises experiential cleaving and creative filtration to concentre on the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy between 1914-1919. To achieve a sense of temporal unity and durative presence, it identifies and isolates instances of clerical advocacy and situates them within broader international developments and circumstances. It portrays a meaningful synthesis of clerical advocacy in reference to confounding happenings such as the outbreak of WWI, the Paris Peace Conference and its consequent Mandate system. The chapter configures a set of disparate experiences: developments in international politics, imperial designs for Iraq, and endogenous aspirations for self-determination, to portray the plot in such a way that its components cohere meaningfully and depict an intelligible series that represents a model of concordance. Collectively, it presents a coherent plot which synthesises heterogenous experiences into a meaningful series that is both enactable and normative.

Najaf: The Ancient City of Shīʿī Theology

Najaf is located 150km from Baghdad and 75km from Karbalāʾ. Before the establishment of Najaf, a broader area known as "Kufa" existed. Kufa is situated on the Euphrates River and

was established by the conquering Muslim armies in 638 CE as a garrison proximate to the Lakhmid Arab Christian city al-Hira.[398] As a key Islamic city, Najaf became prominent after the death of Imām ʿAlī, and the eventual construction of his shrine. The shrine is said to have been created around 786 CE, over a century after the death of Imām ʿAlī. Many Shīʿī scholars hold the area of Kufa and Najaf in divine esteem because it houses the shrine of Imām ʿAlī, the fourth caliph of the first Islamic Caliphate, son-in law of the Prophet Muḥammad, and first Infallible Imām in Shīʿī Islam. Muḥammad al-Bāqir, for example, said "in the lands of Kufa lies such a grave that if a sick person goes to it, Allah (swt) will heal him".[399] Jaʿfar al-Sādiq was the 6th Shīʿī Imām and founder of the Jaʿfari school of jurisprudence. He held a similarly spiritual view of the region stating, "The right side of Kufa is a piece of Heaven".[400]

The Shrine of Ali and the City of Clerics

Najaf has a rich history of collective transnational identity due to its sacred authority. In 1325, North African scholar and explorer Ibn Battuta visited Najaf, describing the city as "a beautiful city lying on expansive and solid land, one of the best and most populous cities in Iraq and the most solidly built, with pleasant and clean markets".[401] Significantly, Battuta observed the autonomous nature of the city from its Mongol governor in Baghdad. He was interested in the distinct system of clerical authority in Najaf's *naqib al-ashraf* (representative of religious nobility). Battuta compared Najaf's religious supreme leader to the rank of great princes. He

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[398] Al-Hira was ruled by the Lakhmid dynasty, a vassal of the Persian Sassanian Empire during the fifth and sixth centuries. See Adam Talib, "Topoi and Topography in the Histories of al-Hīra", in *History and Identity and the Late Antique Near East,* ed. Philip Wood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 123-147.

[399] *Ibid*.

[400] Alamah Majlisi notes that by "right side of Kufa", Ṣādiq is referring to Imām Ali's grave in Najaf. *Ibid*.

[401] Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, ed. Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Macmillan, 2008), 86.

wrote, "To him [naqib al-ashraf] belongs dominion of this city and there are no rulers in it save him, no collectors of taxes for the Sultan or any other".[402] Najaf's religious leader at the time of documenting is not stipulated, although it is likely the Sultan Ibn Battuta referred to was Orhan (d. 1362). The religious nobility Battuta observed in 14th century Najaf would continue to exercise temporal authority for centuries to follow.

Najaf retained institutional autonomy and was largely spared from the trials of war despite several empires contesting modern Iraq over the following centuries. This was maintained through a robust tax system which included collection of *zakāt* and *khums*.[403] Pilgrims from Iran, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere contributed to its economic independence and transnationalised the city. While all cities are transnational and cosmopolitan to a degree, Shīʿī religious migration augmented this process. When Timur led the second Mongol Invasion in 1400, he sacked Baghdad but did not target the holy cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ.[404] In fact, he made a pilgrimage and gave gifts of endowment to the holy shrines, a practice that would continue in the future.[405] In 1508, Najaf surrendered to the Shīʿī Safavid dynasty and was visited by its charismatic leader Shah Ismāʿīl I (d. 1524). Just over a decade later, Süleyman the Magnificent's victory at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 brought Najaf under Ottoman

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[402] *Ibid*.

[403] *Zakāt* is one of the five pillars of Islam. It refers to a form of almsgiving, typically 2.5% of a believers' wealth. *Khums* is a similar tax requiring believers to donate one fifth of their wealth to certain religious causes. Shīʿīsm asserts that during the occultation, the Imām's portion should go towards avenues outlined by the *Marjaʿiyya* such as contributions to mosque and library constructions, as well as donations to seminaries.

[404] See Barry Wood, "The Battle of Chālderān: Official History and Popular Memory", *Iranian Studies* 50:1 (2007): 79-105.

[405] Sabrina Mervin and Yasser Tabbaa, *Najaf: The Gate of Wisdom: History, Heritage & Significance of the Holy City of the Shi'a* (Amman: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014).

control. By the eighteenth century, the prestige and prosperity of shrine cities was highly independent while also benefitting from external sources of imperial patronage.

With the collapse of the Safavid state in 1722, the Shīʿī academic centre shifted from Isfahan to Karbalāʾ and later to Najaf from the mid-eighteenth century. Shrine visitation became closely linked to the socio-economic developments of Najaf and Karbalāʾ and boosted the power of Iraq's Shīʿī mujtahids vis-á-vis the Ottoman government.[406] As noted in Chapter One, Najaf was contested between Shīʿī Qajars and Ottomans for two centuries and also targeted by extreme Sunnī elements. Persian Shīʿī leaders gained fleeting control of Najaf, but it was frequently retaken by Ottoman forces. Nonetheless, Najaf and its shrine benefitted greatly from patronage on both sides, acting as an autonomous and independent buffer between Persian and Ottoman empires. The city was largely able to flourish despite the imperial contestations playing out in the region. However, the *ʿulamā'* were implicated in issues of politics at the inter-polity level concerning Iraqi sovereignty and self-determination.

Sacred Authority and Institutional Advocacy Through *Fatwās*

Najaf wielded immense sacred authority across Iraq and the Shīʿī world before the establishment of the modern nation-state system. Preceding the establishment of the British Mandate in Iraq in 1920, Najaf's *marjaʿiyya* challenged imperial power through the use of *fatwās*. In the lead up to the British Mandate, Shīʿī authority converged with Iraqi nationalism. The colonial experience with the Najafi *marjaʿiyya* was characterised largely by mutual

[406] Yitzhak Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imāms and the Shīʿī Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century", *Studia Islamica* #81 (1985): 153-164, 156.

mistrust and opposition. Repeatedly, the Najafi clerical class viewed colonial interference in Iraqi politics as problematic because it did not represent the general will of the Iraqi people or align with Islamic law. Because Shīʿīsm is inherently transnational, *fatwās* contesting colonial rule originated from across the Muslim world.

Historically, several of Najaf's *marjaʿiyya* have exercised clerical power using *fatwās*. Although *jihād fatwās* undoubtably implicate shrines in world politics, a majority of *fatwās* issued by the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* – constructing shrines as pivots in world politics – relate to protection of the shrine and its educational institution. *Fatwās* are used as tools of intervention when Islamic values are seen as threatened by imperial interference. One example was al-Shirāzī's 1891 'Tobacco Fatwā'.[407]

The *marjaʿiyya* were thrust into the political spotlight often in response to social unrest where spiritual guidance was needed. For believers, the *ʿulamā'* are sources of emulation. This was codified in the Uṣūlī school of fiqh.[408] Because Najaf's *ḥawza* is the centre of Shīʿī scholarship, its clerical class have historically occupied the highest position of Shīʿī erudition. The principle of *taqlīd* (emulation) enhances the *marjaiʿyya*'s centrality to social affairs through *ijtihād.* This is because *taqlīd* requires believers to look to qualified religious scholars when seeking guidance, hence the term *marjaʿ al-taqlīd*.[409] Clerical Shīʿīsm is decentralised, but a clear distinction exists between mujtahid and *marjaʿ*. Mujtahid are scholars capable of deducing

[407] As discussed in Chapters One and Two.

[408] As discussed in Chapter One.

[409] For a detailed account of the nature of political and religious leadership in Shīʿīsm, see Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: the Institution of the Marjaʿ Taqlīd*.

jurisprudential rulings. They are more common than *marjaʿ*, but less influential. The high concentration of *marajiʿ* (plural of *marjaʿ*) in Najaf partly explains, why the city fosters a degree of sacred spatialised authority capable of contesting sovereign power and pivoting the axes of international order. The influence of the *marjaʿiyya* is underpinned by the educational *ḥawza* system.

The *Ḥawza* Institution and Najaf's Sacralised Authority

A key source of grassroots legitimacy for Najaf's sacralised authority comes from its educational *ḥawza*. The institutional structure of the *ḥawza* is well suited to issues of Shīʿī advocacy because of its emphasis on education. At the same time, the *ḥawza*'s political neutrality and emphasis on piety laid the foundations for how it came to be a temporal authority in Iraq. The *ḥawza* did not present an overt political challenge to the authority of the British Mandate, the Baʿathist regime or the transitional government. This helps explain the sacred spatialised authority that emerged across these periods.

Najaf's *ḥawza* is distinct in its stated pursuit of scholarly erudition rather than political influence. A prominent Najafi *marjaʿ*, Bashīr al-Najafi underscores this point by describing the intense curriculum at the ḥawza. He writes,

> As for what distinguishes Najaf academically, it has been found that one day in the life of a student studying in Najaf is more strenuous than the work of an entire week for a student studying elsewhere. Furthermore, although other Ḥawzas of the world are distinguishable with their large quantity of students, Najaf's Ḥawza prides itself with its quality, something highly recognized in Islam.[410]

[410] *Ibid*, 12.

This demonstrates Najaf's focus on Islamic pedagogy rather than political influence. The curriculum of the Najafi *ḥawza* is not uniform, nor is the political thought and philosophy of its *marjaʿiyya*. This is a consequence of centuries of non-standardisation within the early *ḥawza*.[411] This also clarifies why the early *ḥawza* was characteristically non-bureaucratic. Standardisation is a key metric of bureaucratisation. Alshamary links this metric to meritocracy by noting:

> In order to advance a student has to distinguish himself from his peers. The student is not assigned mentors or given a course schedule to facilitate this advancement. Rather, he is expected to actively seek classes that are relevant to their own stage of learning, to set his own schedule, and to manage his own learning.[412]

The *ḥawza* curriculum is highly individualised and learnings are generally student-directed. Although students enjoy broad freedoms while studying at the *ḥawza*, a standardised structure for advancement is in place. Sindawi conducted a study on Najaf's *ḥawza*, dividing the educational structure into three stages.[413] The first is the preliminaries (*al-muqaddamāt*).[414] Depending on the student's aptitude the first stage typically lasts three to five years. Students are typically taught by more advanced students and take subjects on morphology, syntax, rhetoric, concepts of logic, as well as Arabic language and literature.[415] The second stage is divided into two parts or 'surfaces': the 'surfaces of jurisprudence' (*sutūh al-fiqh*) and the

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[411] Litvak, *Shiʿi Scholars of Nineteenth Century Iraq*; Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests".

[412] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 149.

[413] Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shīʿīte Identity".

[414] *Ibid*

[415] *Ibid*, 839.

'upper surfaces' (*al-sutūh al-ʿulyā*). In this stage, students take classes in jurisprudence, philosophy, astronomy, Quʾrān exegesis and other subjects. This stage can take between four to five years and is highly self-directed. Sindawi writes, "At this stage, as in the following two, students enjoy the right to criticize their teachers and to debate with them. The extent of this right depends on the student's abilities. Its purpose is to hone the student's power of observation".[416]

The third stage is where students begin to exercise independent judgement (*ijtihād*). At this stage, students are also teachers and are expected to be able to quote the traditions from memory. Discussing this stage of *ḥawza* education, according to Sindawi,

> The in-depth studies at this stage, the freedom to criticize the opinions of others and the right to debate any proposition, whatever its source, give the students confidence in their own opinions and prepare them to become sources of emulation (marāji ʿ taqlīd).[417]

The duration of this stage varies depending on the maturity and aptitude of the student. Some students may finish within three to five years, others may take up to seven, and some may remain at this level for a lifetime.[418] This robust hierarchal system explains why very few students reach the level of *marjaʿ al-taqlīd*, and also why those that do reach this level are highly influential. Only scholars of elite erudition can issue *fatwās*, hence the concentration of *fatwās* emanating from Najaf. Colonial communiques demonstrate the extent to which Britain

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[416] *Ibid*, 841.

[417] *Ibid*.

[418] *Ibid*, 842.

projected confessionalism playing out in European Christianity onto their understanding of the clerical authority and Sunnī-Shīʿī dynamics.

Colonial Misperception of Iraq's Religious Authority

British understanding of tribal and ethnic dynamics in Iraq simplified a complex landscape, contributing to shared animosity and misperception. British writer-traveller turned political envoy Gertrude Bell was highly influential to British imperial policy.[419] Bell played a major role in the establishment of the modern Iraqi state and the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan. She travelled throughout Mesopotamia, across Arabia, Persia and Asia Minor. However, Bell's accounts of foreign lands were at times inaccurate and deeply embedded in colonial worldviews. In Orientalism, Said makes several criticisms of Gertrude Bell's perception of the Middle East.[420] Said pointed out the ways in which colonial thinkers in the Middle East cast non-Western societies through a prism of "otherness". Islamic in general was subject to colonial knowledge production, which in turn further distorted Western understandings of Shīʿīsm. As Matthew Scott notes,

> Orientalism is not about the under-represented or the excluded, but rather about the ways in which diverse cultures were homogenised and simplified in perpetuity by acts of representation that left their actual objects concealed.[421]

[419] Paul Collins and Charles Tripp, eds., *Gertrude Bell and Iraq: A Life and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[420] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[421] Matthew Scott, "Edward Said's *Orientalism*", *Essays in Criticism* 58:1 (January 2008): 64-81, 66.

Colonial communiques simplified the clerical establishment in Najaf by projecting the confessionalism playing out in European Christianity onto their understandings of Sunnī-Shīʿī dynamics. One recurrent theme portrays the *marjaʿiyya* as a more troublesome variation of the Vatican. The analogy was expressed in Intelligence Reports where the religious leadership was often referred to as "the Shiʿah Vatican".[422] However, this Islamic version of the Vatican was portrayed by scholars such as Bell as "exceedingly fanatical".[423] Bell's oriental assessment of the Shīʿa in Iraq was one factor contributing to British overestimation of support before the Arab Revolt.[424] After a tribal encounter leaving the holy lands in Iraq, Bell wrote:

> The tribes are not Bedu but Arab, a very important distinction, for they have not the code and rules of the Beduin. But these Shia people are a great deal worse than any one we have met upon our whole way.[425]

In a letter to her father nine years later, Bell described the situation in Najaf as if "a number of alien Popes permanently settled at Canterbury and started issuing edicts which take precedence of the law of the land".[426] The frustrations of the colonial authorities with Najaf continued to grow, as evident in letters exchanged between Civil Administrator James Saumerez Mann, and his father. Mann wrote, "The only place where vice is beastly and intolerable is Najaf, because it is combined there with the quintessence of Pharisaism and a blasphemous parody of holiness,

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[422] Intelligence Report No. 1," 5; "Intelligence Report No. 4," December 31, 1920, 4, FO 371/6348/2904, United Kingdom National Archives.

[423] The Letters of Gertrude Bell "On Najaf and Karbalāʾ 5th March 1911.

[424] British political officer, A. H. Ditchburn blamed the 1920 revolt on the "bigotry and fanaticism of the anti-British ʿulamāʾ at Najaf". See A. H. Ditchburn, "A History of the Muntafiq during the Mesopotamian Disturbances of 1920," 1921, 19, CO 696/3, United Kingdom National Archives, 111.

[425] *Ibid*, 22 March 1911.

[426] "Gertrude Bell to Sir Hugh Bell, 23 August 1920," *Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University*. Mathieson interprets this analogy as referring to "British views of the Catholic Church in Rome as hindering the development of the modern British state". See Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 609.

and that I must say I can't stand".[427] Frustration towards the Shīʿī became a recurring theme in the British colonial experience in Iraq.

These are just some examples of imperial knowledge production in the Muslim world where Shīʿīsm is portrayed and exotified as the Islamic "other". It is for this reason, colonial objectification, and simplification of the Shīʿa affected British understandings of the religious authority and the potency of *fatwās*. Mathieson describes Oriental portrayals of Islam as "projections for struggles being played out in Europe. Terms such as 'church' and 'sect' or 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy' were applied to Islam… Sunnism became associated with the Church and Shiism became a sect".[428] Other British officials expressed distain towards the clerical class in Najaf and their role in the political process. Discussing the situation in Iraq, Gertrude Bell wrote to her father warning,

> If you're going to have anything like really representative institutions… you would have a majority of Shiʿahs. . . I don't for a moment doubt that the final authority must be in the hands of the Sunnis, in spite of their numerical inferiority; otherwise you will have a mujtahid-run theocratic state, which is the very devil.[429]

Mathieson points out that Bell's gender and lack of access to the *marjaʿiyya* in addition to her socialisation with Sunnīs in Iraq, likely impacted her perception of the Shīʿī.[430] As the British occupation lasted longer, colonial communiques demonstrate greater British awareness of the

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[427] James Saumerez Mann, *An Administration in the Making* (London: Longmans, 1921), 193.

[428] Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 193.

[429] Gertrude Bell to Sir. Hugh Bell, 3 October 1920," *Gertrude Bell Archive*, Newcastle University, http://gertrudebell.ncl.ac.uk/letters.php.

[430] Mathieson, *The Caliph and the Imam*, 609.

power of the Najaf's *ʿulamā'*. Discussing the power of the clerical class in Najaf, James Mann told his father, "It is said that the more powerful of them [the mujtahids of Najaf] could excommunicate the Shah of Persia himself".[431] In his memoirs on his time in Iraq, Bertam Thomas emphasised the influence of the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'*. He referred to the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ as "the Vatican of Iraq" and stated that they held "the keys of heaven and hell".[432]

Najaf's Sacred Authority and Resistance against British Colonialism

Najaf's sacred authority was central to the Shīʿīte resistance against British occupation in Iraq (1914-1921). *Fatwās* were significant devices for clerical power to pivot the axes of international order through resistance to imperialism. In Iraq, Shīʿī shrine cities became networks of resistance against colonial authority. Al-Nifīsī argues this has been the case for Kufa and Najaf since the death of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (661AD).[433] He portrays the Shīʿītes in southern Iraq as a permanent centre of revolution which refuses to accept authority until the return of the twelfth Imām.[434] With the rise of prestige and wealth of Najaf's *ḥawza*, the shrine city gained salience as a key site of Shīʿī pilgrimage and scholarship. While radical attitudes were networked between shrine cities, they were most prominently articulated in Najaf where sacred authority, strengthened by the *ḥawza* institution, sought to resist Orientalist tropes.

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[431] Mann, *An Administration in the Making*, 178.

[432] Bertram Thomas, *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 83.

[433] 'Abdullah Al-Nifīsī, *Dawr Al-Shi'a Fī Taṭawir Al-Iraq Al-Siyāsī Al-Ḥadīth* (Shiite's Role In The Development of Modern Iraq's Politics) (Kuwait: Afāq, 2012).

[434] *Ibid*.

In the lead up to WWI, Najaf became a space of sacred authority and contestation. The outbreak of the world war saw major political upheavals throughout the Muslim world. This gave rise to anti-colonial sentiment advocated by Najaf's clerical authority. The *marjaʿiyya* issued *fatwās* against the Italian invasion of Libya as well as Russian and British incursions in Iran. In 1911, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzim al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī al-Yazdī issued a *fatwā* rebuking imperialism, which read:

> These days European countries, such as Italy, have invaded Tripoli on the one hand, and on the other, Russians have occupied Northern Iran with their forces and the British disembarked their forces in Southern Iran, and thereby they threatened Islam. So, it is an obligation for all Muslims, both Arabs, and Iranians, to prepare themselves for pushing the unbelievers away from the Islamic territories; they should do their best with their money and their lives to push the Italian forces away from Tripoli and the British and Russian forces from Iran. This is the most important Islamic obligation today. May these two Islamic countries be protected against the Cruciate, with God's help.[435]

Here, it is important to point out the anti-imperial framing of the *fatwā*. Imperialism was seen as a threat not only to Iraq but more broadly across the Islamic world. The outbreak of WWI created a new set of issues for Najaf's clerical authority, which happened in quick succession. On 28 June 1914, Austrian Duke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian extremist.[436] In response, Russia mobilised its forces in support of Serbia on 30 July 1914. In turn, Germany mobilised its forces in support of Austria on 1 August and entered into a secret pact with the Ottoman Empire. By 31 October, the Ottomans joined Germany and Austria in the war against the allies.[437]

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[435] Alī Dawānī, *Nahḍat-i ruhāniyūn-i Iran* (Tehran: Bunyād-I farhangī-yi Imām Ridā, 1981), 131.

[436] Ian Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates: The British Occupation of Iraq and the Great Arab Revolt, 1914-1921* (London: Saqi Books, 2014), 49.

[437] *Ibid*.

Najaf's clerical authority became implicated in the war when Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V requested the clerical authority to support his declaration of holy war against the Entente powers. al-Yazdī obliged on the condition that local clerics imprisoned by the Ottomans were released. The Ottomans agreed and, on the 16 December 1914, al-Yazdī and several other mujtahids issued a *fatwā* which stated: "Defend the Islamic territories and mandating those unable to participate in fighting provide money to contribute financially for enabling those who are physically able to participate".[438] It should be noted that that not everyone followed the *fatwā*. According to Dashti, "many of the tribes in the South of Iraq were at odds with the Ottoman Empire".[439] Certain clerics were disinclined to participate because they had benefitted from the Oudh Bequest. This diversity was amplified by the decentralised nature of the 20th century *ḥawza*.

Despite this, Najaf's clerical authority effectively mobilised a variety of Iraqis sects, tribes and ethnicities to unite in *jihād* against the British.[440] Many tribes were sceptical of supporting the Ottoman's against the British because of the historically difficult relationship between the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* and the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, the *fatwā* was crucial in obligating support

[438] Ali al-Wardi, *Lamahāt Ijtima'iyya min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Ḥadīth* (Social Glimpses from the Modern History of Iraq) (London: Kufaan, 1991), 128.

[439] Eissa Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British Occupation 1914-1921" (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2017), 64.

[440] Kāmil al-Jubūrī, *Watha'iq al-Thawra al-Iraqiya al-Kubra Muqadimatuha Wa Nata'ijuha* (Documents of Great Iraqi Revolution Introductions and Results) (Najaf: Dar al-Mu'arrikh al'Arabi, 2009); See Werner Ende, "Iraq in the World War I: The Turks, the Germans and the Shiʿite Mujtahids' Call for Jihād", *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabistes et Islamisants,* ed. Rudolph Peters (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 65-66.

for the cause of resistance. The Ottoman Empire desperately required the support of the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* in Najaf to confront the threat of British colonialism.

Fatwā transmission at this time was largely conducted by word of mouth. The jihād *fatwā* circulated orally as clerics moving south stopped and encouraged tribal leaders to join the fight against the British.[441] According to the Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia prepared by Gertrude Bell and Arnold Wilson,

> If the circulation [of the *fatwā*] was not very large the paper reached a wider public than the numbers bought would seem to indicate, for a population almost wholly illiterate it is the habit for one who has an acquittance with letters to read the news aloud to the company gathered round him in a coffee shop, and one copy will therefore serve to instruct a group of listeners.[442]

It is not accurate to say that *fatwās* were less effective before the invention of the printing press. Rather, the printing press improved the speed at which information could be shared among communities. Rutledge notes:

> By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, people in those cities were reading journals from Turkey, Persia, Egypt and India. In 1911 it was estimated that between fifty and a hundred different newspapers were available in Najaf's libraries every week.[443]

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[441] Juan Cole, "British Policy Towards the Iraqi Shiites during the First World War", *Journal of Contemporary Iraq & the Arab World* 15:3 (2021): 285-304, 289.

[442] Gertrude Bell and Arnold Wilson, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia* (H.M. Stationery Office: London, 1920), 19.

[443] Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, 165.

Therefore, while Najaf was relatively isolated from the rest of the Ottoman Empire, it remained connected to world affairs through newspapers and magazines. Despite the clerical establishment's support for the Ottoman's *jihād* against the Entente forces, there were localised rebellion against Ottoman rule in Najaf and Karbalāʾ, which granted both cities fleeting de-facto autonomy between 1915-1916. Najaf drove the Ottomans out in April 1915 due to "overzealous and coercive conscription" into its central army.[444] This meant that Najaf was essentially self-governed during the early years of WWI. Meanwhile, Britain was making advances towards Iraq's south.

Mesopotamia was a significant theatre in WWI between the Ottoman Empire and Allied forces. Great Britain's primary interest in the region was to protect trade routes to India and the Indian Ocean.[445] Therefore, control of Basra was the only clear objective for the Mesopotamia campaign. According to Sluglett, once British forces arrived in Basra, the Commander in Chief in India, Sir Beauchamp Duff instructed Sir John Nixon to submit "plans for the effective occupation of the Basra wilaya and for a subsequent advance on Baghdad".[446] By October 1915, British forces had captured 'Amara, and reached as far as Al-Aziziyah, 80 kilometres from Baghdad. However, Great Britain did not have a clear plan for its objectives in Mesopotamia, as Bell told Percy Cox in late 1916: "The real difficult here is that we don't know exactly what we intend to do in this country".[447] Despite its ambiguous strategy in Iraq, Britain had greater clarity on the international stage. In May 1916, the Sykes-Picot Agreement

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[444] *Ibid*, 163; Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 2.

[445] Peter Sluglett, *Contriving King and Country* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 2.

[446] *Ibid*, 9.

[447] *Ibid*, 11-12.

was ratified, dividing the Ottoman territories between French and British zones of influence.[448] On the ground in Iraq, Britain continued to consolidate its control throughout 1917, taking Baghdad in March and Sāmarrāʾ in May.[449]

The Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia records that the *ʿulamāʾ* of Najaf and Karbalāʾ sent a telegram to congratulate King George V, presumably regarding Britain's capture of Baghdad. The source states that King George replied by expressing his "earnest desire for the welfare of the 'Iraq and its people, the preservation of its holy places and the restoration of its ancient prosperity".[450] Reference to Iraq's holy places is a noteworthy example of Great Britain's interest, albeit mostly rhetorical, interest in Iraq's sacred spaces.

Tensions rose in Najaf as the British advanced through Iraq. In late 1917, A British calvary patrol was attacked from the city's walls, a plane flying over the city received heavy rifle fire, and government offices housing pro-British officials were attacked, forcing staff forced to flee to Kufa.[451] In response, the British imposed a fine of 50,000 Rs, 500 rifles, and the arrest of two individuals suspected of involvement. The fine was paid, but the two individuals quickly left Najaf and the rifles provided were not functional.[452] Local sentiments towards the British

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[448] However, the agreement was not made public until a year later. For more on the Sykes-Picot agreement, see Michael D. Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East: Sir Mark Sykes, Imperialism and the Sykes-Picot Agreement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

[449] Sluglett, *Contriving King and Country*, 12.

[450] Bell and Wilson, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, 32.

[451] Rutledge, *Enemy on the Euphrates*, 167.

[452] *Ibid*.

were already negative, and these events further fuelled a grassroots mobilisation group that would incite a localised rebellion.

1918 Najaf Uprisings and the League of the Islamic Awakening

Najaf was at the centre of the Arab revolts in Iraq and provided a precursor to the larger revolt which took place two years later.[453] In 1918, the British governor of Najaf was assassinated, causing a ripple effect that would lead to nationwide rebellion. The Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* proved to be Britain's most formidable obstacle in Iraq. In the weeks leading up to the assassination, a group of Shīʿīte clerics established the League of the Islamic Awakening (*Jimʿyat al-Nahda al-Islamiya*). The establishment of the League of the Islamic Awakening enhanced clerical authority in Najaf. The city became a key site of resistance against the British administration. The League comprised a plurality of Shīʿī clerics, tribal notaries, and grassroots youth support. Shirāzī supported the League while al-Yazdī was less supportive. The decentralised and non-bureaucratic structure of the *ḥawza* partly explains this diversity. Despite this diversity, the League expressed a form of collective Shīʿī identity based on anti-colonial and emancipatory patriotic sentiment. Given the geographic proximity of Najaf, the League was able to network between Baghdad and Karbalāʾ.

The League issued 21 articles outlining the core beliefs and tenants of the movement. The first article emphasised: "Muslims should link with each other under the Islamic League to come

[453] See Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*; Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de I'rak contemporain: le role politique des ulémas chiites à la fin de la domination ottoman et au moment de la construction de L'État irakien* (The Formation of Contemporary Iraq: The Political Role of Shiite ʿulamā' at the End of Ottoman Rule and Time of the Construction of the Iraq State) (Paris, Édition de Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1991).

together and collaborate in order for Islam to act as a single force in the face of adversity and hardship".[454] The second article advocated the application of Islamic concepts and law to Islamic communities.[455] The third article argued complete support for the independence of Islamic governments across the Islamic world and in Iraq. All remaining articles centred on an intent to unify the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide in Iraq, promoting a form of independent nationalism through frameworks of religion. Importantly, the seventh point emphasised that a religious authority must be head of the organisation.[456]

British Captain Francis Balfour, nephew to British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and colonial administrator of Najaf, was tasked with quashing the rebellion in Najaf. However, Balfour's imperial designs for Iraq were frequently obstructed by the clerical authority in Najaf. Balfour recognised the threat of the League early but was hesitant to act due to the potential consequences of attacking a holy city such as Najaf. On the evening of 18 March 1918, however, revolutionary members of the League met and agreed to attack the British administration in Najaf.[457] The next morning, the revolutionaries assassinated the governor of Najaf, Captain W.M. Marshall.[458] This proved pivotal to the Shīʿī resistance against British occupation in Iraq. British strategy against the Najaf rebellion was complicated by the prestige and heritage of the holy city. Any attacks on the city would anger local tribes and allow the

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[454] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British Occupation", 98-99.

[455] *Ibid*, 99.

[456] Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3:2 (1972): 123-139.

[457] Karim Salih, *Najim Al-Baqal: Qā'id Al-Thawrat al-Najaf did al-'Ihtilāl al-Inkīlīzī 'ām 1918: Hāyātuh wa dawruh fi al-ahdāth* (Najim Al-Baqāl: Leader of the Najaf Revolution Against the English Occupation: His Life and His Role During the Conflict) (Najaf: Al-Nu'mān, 1980), 76.

[458] Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 3.

Ottoman Empire to amplify Muslim grievances around the Muslim world. For this reason, the envoy of the world's largest empire engaged in a series of interactions with the clerical authority in Najaf, beginning with Sayyid Muḥammad al-Yazdī.[459]

Intent on not giving the League unnecessary political legitimacy, the British administration sought to negotiate solely with al-Yazdī. The situation came to the attention of Sir Arnold Wilson in Baghdad, the colonial administrator for Mesopotamia under Percy Cox. Captain Balfour met with al-Yazdī, providing him with a list of demands ranging from fines of 1,000 rifles and 50,000 rupees for those involved in the death of Captain Marshall, and the arrests of various clerics such as Muḥammad ʿAli Bahar al-ʿUlum and Muḥammad Jawad al-Jazaʿiri.[460] Contrasting the majority of Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* in Najaf, Al-Yazdi expressed a position of neutrality on the issue of negotiations with the British. As a result, al-Yazdī was viewed by the British as a suitable mediator between the revolutionary forces in Najaf and the British administration. While al-Yazdī's neutrality does not directly denote his role as mediator, it was all but ascribed given his positionality among the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* and wider Shīʿī population in Iraq.

The Siege of Najaf

In response to the assassination of Captain Marshall, the British laid siege to Najaf which lasted just over one month in March–May 1918. British forces isolated Najaf from all sides, cutting

[459] "Letters From Najafi Clerics to British Commander General" 26 March 1918 and "Letters From Captain Balfour to Sayyid Muḥammad al-Yazdi and Clerics of Najaf", Volume 2 (2 April 1918): 53-55.

[460] Abd al-Razaq Al-Ḥasani, *al Thawra al'Iraqiyya al-Kubra* (The Major Iraq Revolution) (Sidon: Matbaʿat al-ʿIrfan, 1952), 73.

off water supplies to the city.[461] This led to inflated prices for food and water and affected the lives of Najafi residents as well as members of the League of Islamic Awakening. The rebels were unable to leave Najaf, and the situation was increasingly dire for everyday residents. This placed the clerical authority and al-Yazdī in a complicated situation. Reports suggest that letters sent by rebels to neighbouring tribes were intercepted by the British who killed the messengers.[462] Unable to foster support from tribes, al-Yazdī was forced to negotiate with the British. Kadhim notes that Iraqis learned an important lesson from the Najaf uprisings: "no successful uprising could be achieved without the involvement of the tribes".[463]

Al-Yazdī's restraint contained the extent of the revolution in Najaf. Had he issued a *fatwā* calling for armed rebellion against the British, the revolutionaries in Najaf would have seen broader support and collective mobilisation. The establishment of the League of the Islamic Awakening laid the groundwork for a collective political Shīʿī identity and anti-colonial resistance which flourished between the holy cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, paving the way for passive resistance to the British occupation. Alshamary makes the point that most of the clerics who fought the British in 1917 and 1918 were quite young, thus having less institutional responsibility. By contrast, Alshamary argues that "most elite clerics – feeling a heightened sense of responsibility for protection of the *hawza* – will get involved in a mediatory capacity if protests hit the tipping point, usually a violent one".[464] Moreover, the institution itself was

[461] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British Occupation", 105.

[462] Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 3.

[463] *Ibid*.

[464] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 119.

decentralised and non-bureaucratised.[465] While not explicit, the sentiment expressed from the elite clerical authority in Najaf encouraged self-determination but primarily the protection of the *ḥawza* institution.

Wilson's The Fourteen Points and Britain's Imperial Dilemma

Sir Arnold Wilson pursued the continuation of British governance in Iraq as a strategic imperative for Great Britain. Arnold Wilson's objectives were complicated by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" speech delivered to congress on 8 January 1918.[466] In the speech Wilson outlined his vision of a new post-war order, based on the principles of democracy, freedom and self-determination. The speech promoted open diplomacy, an end to secret treatises, freedom of navigation, adjustments to colonial claims, and the creation of the League of Nations.[467] Importantly, the twelfth point on the Ottoman Empire noted:

> The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.[468]

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[465] *Ibid*.

[466] For Wilson's fourteen points speech see *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, eds. Arthur S. Link et al. vol.45 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); For a critical assessment of Wilson's Fourteen Points see Trygve Throntveit, "The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination", *Diplomatic History* 35:3 (June 2011): 445-481.

[467] "President Woodrow Wilson's Message to Congress, January 8, 1918", *Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; National Archives*, 8 January 1918, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5752371.

[468] *Ibid*, XXI.

This point was problematic for the British because since May 1917, its policy was to annex Basra with a fringe position of its government seeking to colonise Iraq with Indian farmers.[469] The Fourteen points placed particular pressure on Britain's imperial ambitions to continue its control of Iraq. Dodge notes that "Imperial ideology justified this annexation [of Basra] in both strategic and civilisational terms; "the people of the East" were in no sense yet considered ready for self-government".[470] This imperial ideology forced a strategic disjuncture with President Wilson's articulated principles at the core of the League of Nations. As a compromise between this international liberal idealism and great power politics, Wilson's advisor George Louis Beer proposed the idea of a League of Nations administered "mandate" system of indirect rule over former Ottoman territories.[471]

The Mandate system would become a core component of Wilson's League of Nations and frequently debated during the Paris Peace Conference (January 1919- January 1920). While Britain began assessing how to balance its national interests in Mesopotamia and the relatively new international obligations flowing from Woodrow Wilson's liberalism and Fourteen points speech, Arnold Wilson set about to gauge local opinions on the future of Iraq's governance.[472]

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[469] Ghassan Atiyah, *Iraq, 1908-1921: A Socio-political Study* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1973), 160; Dodge writes, "From the beginning of the war until 1920 the consensus of opinion amongst British politicians and diplomats was that Basra, as the most strategic and economically valuable area of Iraq, would be annexed to the Empire". See Toby Dodge, "The British Mandate in Iraq, 1920-1932", *The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974* (Reading: Cengage Learning EMEA, 2006), 1-5, 2.

[470] Toby Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism; The Birth of the Iraqi State Under the Mandate System", in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Nadine Meouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 143-165, 146.

[471] *Ibid*.

[472] Describing Arnold Wilson at this time, Dodge writes: "Wilson, ideologically unable to accept the new situation, set about the task of governing Iraq as if nationalism, Woodrow Wilson and the League did not

The Iraqi Referendum and the Clerical Authority

The question over governance in Iraq divided British policymakers because several options for political authority conceivably existed. For instance, Edwin Samuel Montagu, Secretary of State of India wrote to Wilson in November 1918. He recommended the lower region of Iraq be governed by Abdullah b. Sharif Hussein, while the upper region be governed by Zayd b. al-Sharif Hussein.[473] The idea of an Arab prince ruling Iraq, such as Hussein, was popular among British intelligentsia because it implied the continuation of British administration of state affairs. Wilson was of the opinion Sir Percy Cox be appointed delegate for five years until an appropriate prince or king could be identified for leadership.[474] Colonial perceptions of 'ancient hatreds' within the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide were utilised to justify the continuation of British occupation.

To decide the future of Iraq, Sir Arnold Wilson devised the following set of questions to be answered through referendum:

> Do you favour a single Arab state under British tutelage, stretching from the northern border of Mosul to the Gulf?
>
> In this case, should an Arab prince be named for this state?

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exist. Britain, he argued, could no maintain its position in Iraq "by conciliating extremists" and that "regardless of the League of Nations", Britain should "go very slowly with constitutional and democratic institutions, the application of which to Eastern countries had been attempted of late years with so small a degree of success". See Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 15-16.

[473] F.O. 371/4148/13298. "War Cabinet-Eastern Committee. 39th Meeting, Dated 27 November 1918".

[474] Arnold Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920 A Clash of Loyalties: A Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 108.

If so, who should be chosen as president?[475]

By design, the referendum process was geared towards a favourable outcome for the British. Wilson designed the process to be rolled out across various *velayats* in Mesopotamia. Basra was receptive to British administration because of the large merchant class and landowners who benefitted from British trade. The British envoy in Basra, Evelyn N. Howell, consulted various representatives in the region, reporting that a majority of inhabitants supported Iraqi independence but not in the form of an Arab prince. Furthermore, a religious portion of society was opposed to British occupation, viewing them as infidels.[476] Certain nationalists in Basra supported the prince system while others stood to benefit from the status-quo. Additionally, opposition to the British was raised from several levels of society. Discussions with those in Najaf indicated a preference for an Islam-guided Emir with British support where necessary.[477]

In Karbalāʾ, an Islamic government without British presence was advocated. In Nasiriyah, sentiment against the appointment of an Arab prince and partial support for British administration was apparent. While it was clear Iraqi opinion was divided, the oriental perception of Iraq as ungovernable was broadly shared. In a letter from July 1919, Wilson wrote "to install a real Arab Government in Mesopotamia is impossible, and, if we attempt it,

[475] Alan Rush, "From Secretary of State for India to Civil Commissioner Baghdad No.11608, 27 November 1918, 157.

[476] F.O. 882/23/3505 "Telegram from P.P Basra, to Civil Commissioner, Baghdad – no.536. 21 December 1918". Quoted in Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 122.

[477] This stratum of society supported Percy Cox's return to Iraq. See F.O. 882/23/3505 'Self-Determination in Iraq: Secret Compilation of Declarations and Telegram – no 2', 7.

we shall abandon the Middle East to anarchy".[478] Instead, what transpired was unprecedented levels of coordinated clerical mobilisation across Iraq's shrine cities.

Najaf's Clerical Mobilisation

Resistance against the British referendum was networked between Baghdad and the holy shrine cities of Najaf, Karbalāʾ and Kadhimiya. The existence of pre-modern pilgrimage routes accelerated connectivity between cities.[479] While some merchants and landowners benefitted from British occupation, tribal leaders played a key role in the popular resistance to the referendum. Religious authority crystallised this resistance through *fatwās* which were mobilised to guide public opinion towards independence from British occupation and tutelage. Wilson chose Najaf as the first city to conduct the referendum due to its political and religious significance in Iraq and across the Shīʿī world.[480] He viewed Najaf's support for the referendum as vital to Britain's strategic interests in Mesopotamia.

The clerical authority of senior Shīʿī clerics including al-Yazdī, Muḥammad Taqi al-Shirāzī, and Fathallah al-Isfahānī derailed these colonial designs.[481] This was done through *Hibz al-*

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[478] Charles Townshend, *Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011), 447.

[479] During the reign of Sultan Midhat Pasha in 1872, the Ottoman's built a horse-drawn tramway between Baghdad and Kadhimiya designed to transport pilgrims. The tramway was considered state of the art at that time in the Middle East. See Justin Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood* (London: Penguin Books, 2015).

[480] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 126.

[481] Concise biographies of each of these individuals are available online at WikiShia.net. For al-Yazdī, see https://en.wikishia.net/view/Al-Sayyid_Muhammad_Kazim_al-Yazdi. For al-Isfahānī, see https://en.wikishia.net/view/Fath_Allah_Gharawi_Isfahani. For al-Shirāzī, see https://en.wikishia.net/view/Muhammad_Taqi_al-Shirazi. Wikishia.net is run by the Ahl Al-Bayt World

Najaf Al-Siri (the Secret Party of Najaf). In response to the referendum, influential families, tribal leaders, and clerics unified to form *Hibz al-Najaf Al-Siri*.[482] Wilson met with al-Yazdī seeking support for the British plan. Contrasting those calling for Arab rule in Iraq, al-Yazdī reportedly told Wilson,

> If appointed any Arab employee as a ruler, it will lead to chaos, and until now, the residents of Iraq have not learned integrity yet, and they must remain under the authority of the British Government. In addition, there is no Arab man acceptable to the people as a prince for Iraq.[483]

Al-Yazdī's opposition to an Arab Kingdom was a pessimism towards an Iraqi nation state ruled by an Arab king rather than a denial of Iraqi independence. Meanwhile, the Secret Party of Najaf met to discuss their options. Ultimately, acknowledging the obstacles to establishing a republican system, they agreed that since they were not Persians nor Turks, did not support British appointment of government, and were Arabs, therefore an Arab must rule.[484]

The group went to visit al-Yazdī to inform him of the meeting's outcome. He apologised and replied ambiguously: "I am a man of religion. I do not know about politics, but I know this is

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Assembly. Founded by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in 1990, the organisation claims to be an international non-governmental organisation (INGO). Critics claim the organisation is a source of propaganda for Iran's support of Islamist militant groups in the Middle East. See, "How Iran exports its Ideology: Ahlul Bayt World Assembly", *United Against Nuclear Iran*, n.d., https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/ideological-expansion/ahlul-bayt-world-assembly. While there is validity to these criticisms, the historical information on wikishia.net can be considered valid because it predates the establishment of the Iranian state and supersedes all other online repositories of Shīʿī history.

[482] *Ibid*, 127.

[483] F.O. 371/4148/13298 "From Political Officer, Baghdad, 14 December 1918. Quoted in Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 128.

[484] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 129.

forbidden, and this is allowed".[485] Memory of the devastating siege of Najaf likely factored in influencing Yazdī's calculation. Without the support of the head Shīʿīte authority, several factions of Najafi society sent submissions to the British with a variety of desired outcomes. Merchants sought the continuation of the British administration. Dignitaries also supported British rule, while rejecting the appointment of an Arab prince.[486] Shared among all those in Najaf was the desire for independence in Iraq. Najaf's clerical authority broadly rejected the notion of indirect British rule over Iraq with factions adopting activist and quietist approaches to the issue. Ultimately, Najaf became a site of sovereign contestation of the political sphere.

Karbalāʾ and Shirāzī's *Fatwā*

During this period, Karbalāʾ became a key site of clerical authority. Under al-Shirāzī, Karbalāʾ played a more active role in resistance to British rule. Along with al-Isfahānī, al-Shirāzī sent a series of telegrams to US President Woodrow Wilson seeking support for Iraqi independence and self-determination. Before the referendum, al-Shirāzī was based in the holy shrine city of Sāmarrāʾ. Many urged al-Shirāzī to move to Najaf because of al-Yazdī's passive position on the British. Instead, he moved to Karbalāʾ where he was widely supported. From Karbalāʾ, al-Shirāzī issued a pivotal *fatwā* in January 1919, prohibiting the election of a non-Muslim to rule Muslims.[487]

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[485] *Ibid*. This mirrors another state by al-Yazdi in which a primary source notes "He said that he had long since retired from the world; if they wished for his opinion on the word of God, he was prepared to give it, but he would not express any view on the affairs of the State". See Bell and Wilson, *Review of the Civil Administration in Mesopotamia*, 36.

[486] F.O. 882/23/3505, "Self Determination in Iraq: Secret Compilation of Declarations and Telegram – no.7 (2-15), 15.

[487] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 131.

Shirāzī's *fatwā* shifted public opinion in Iraq and unified the sentiment of nationalists with the clerical class. The *fatwā* was worded in such a way that did not imply the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by a Shīʿī clerical authority. Rather, it simply stated that the ruler should be a Muslim, something continued direct British rule could not achieve. Using Islam as a common denominator, Shirāzī demonstrated to the British that the *marjaʿiyya* as a collective were capable of affecting dynamics in the region, an issue overlooked by the British after the relative compliance of al-Yazdī.[488] Although the *marjaʿiyya* refused to recognise the British administration, it was willing to engage international society through the League of Nations. With Najaf's remaining relatively absent from Iraq's push for self-determination, Karbalāʾ became a centre of clerical advocacy because of al-Shirāzī.

Shirāzī writes to Washington

Collective resistance and mobilisation against the British was successfully networked between shrine cities. The British overestimated al-Yazdī's powers as the chief Shīʿī authority in Iraq and misunderstood the decentralised nature of Shīʿīsm across Iraq. With little trust in the British, on 21 February 1919, al-Shirāzī and al-Isfahānī sent two telegrams in Persian and Arabic to US President Woodrow Wilson requesting support for self-determination in Iraq.[489] In the second letter, the clerics conveyed to the president,

[488] For more on Shirāzī's socio-political impact in Iraq and use of fatwās, see Ali Teymoori, "Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī Shirāzī", *Ijtihād Network*, 12 May 2017, http://ijtihādnet.com/mirza-mu%e1%b8%a5ammad-Taqī-Shirāzī/.

[489] "Telegram from Sheik Muḥammad Taqī al-Haʿiri al-Shirāzī and Sheik Fathallah Sheik al-Sharīʿa al-Asfghani to U.S. President Wilson, 6 February Vol. 2 (1919): 220-221.

> The desire of all Iraqis, as [members of] a Muslim nation is that they should be given the liberty to choose a new independent Arab and Islamic state, with a Muslim king assisted by a national assembly. As far as the question of a protectorate (wisaya, i.e. this letter antedates the term mandate, intidab) is concerned, it should be up to the national assembly to accept it or reject it, after the convening of a peace conference.[490]

Shirāzī and al-Isfahānī concluded their letter to US President Wilson by expressing their wish that his name would "be forever associated in history to the liberty of Iraq".[491] The clerics letter ultimately went unanswered, but this did not affect the religious authority's intent to engage in international affairs. The telegrams came at an important time in international politics as debates in Paris closed in on the idea of a "mandate" system – exposing a disjuncture between what Dodge describes as "Wilson's liberal notions of the conduct of international relations and more blatant imperialistic approaches, and also a schism in the British empire's own delegation".[492]

On 30 January 1919, the Paris Peace Conference's supreme council agreed that the Ottoman territories would be "administered by 'advanced nations' on the principle 'that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization'".[493] This became a pivotal

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[490] Quoted in Luizard, "Le mandate britannique en Irak: une ren-contre entre plusieurs projets politiques", in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 363-64.

[491] *Ibid*, 370.

[492] Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism", 147.

[493] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.

step towards the establishment of a three-tier mandate system which would be enshrined in Article 22 of the League Covenant.

South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts proposed the application of the mandate system through a pamphlet circulated on 16 December 1918.[494] Smuts suggestion resembled Beer's proposal but included more explicit codification and administration by League of Nations, in addition to its other principles such as self-determination, international accountability, non-annexation and non-militarisation.[495] Article 22 of the League Covenant outlined the framework for the League's mandate system. 'A-Mandates' would apply to the former Ottoman territories, 'B-Mandates' applied to central African territories, and 'C-Mandates' applied to other areas including Southwest Africa and South Pacific Islands.[496] Specifically referring to A-Mandates, Paragraph Four of Article 22 stated:

> Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.[497]

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[494] Jan Smuts, *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (New York: The Nation Press, 1919).

[495] Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism", 147; Carsten Stahn, *The Law and Practice of International Territorial Administration: Versailles to Iraq and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.

[496] Stahn, *The Law and Practice of International Territorial Administration*, 76; Ramendra N. Chowdhuri, *International Mandates and Trusteeships Systems, A Comparative Study* (The Hague: Matinus Nijhoff, 1955); For more on the development of the mandate plan, see William R. Louis, "The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922", *International Organization* 23:1 (1969): 73-76.

[497] "Palestine question – Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations", *United Nations*, 28 June 1919, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-185531/.

Stahn describes the Mandate system as a "pragmatic compromise" for two reasons.[498] On the one hand, by endowing the League with supervisory administrative authority, it was an improvement from the practice of post-war annexation and direct subjugation.[499] On the other hand, the Mandate system "served as surrogate of conquest, because it granted the victorious powers the substance of control over newly acquired territories".[500] As Britain was consolidating its Mandate over Iraq on the international stage, al-Yazdī's passing on 30 April 1919 led to a significant shift in its liaison with Iraq's clerical authority.

Given his relative reticence, al-Yazdī's death caused the British considerable concern in Iraq. The British wrote to al-Shirāzī offering condolences for al-Yazdī's passing, reminding him of al-Yazdī's wise approach towards the British.[501] The British hoped that al-Shirāzī would adopt a similarly quietist stance to political affairs in Iraq, but this was not the case. Al-Shirāzī used his new platform to advocate the issue of Iraqi self-determination to various institutions of international society. In June 1919, he wrote to Faisal b. Hussein asking for the issue to be presented to the Paris Peace Conference and to the League of Nations.[502] Faisal replied in September of the same year, thanking him for the responsibility of representing Iraqi independence on the world stage, and promising to do his best.[503] Amidst Paris Peace Conference negotiations, the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, formally ending

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[498] Stahn, *The Law and Practice of International Territorial Administration*, 75.

[499] *Ibid*.

[500] *Ibid*.

[501] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 140.

[502] "Telegram from Sheik Muḥammad Taqī al-Ha'iri al-Shirāzī to Faisal b. Huessin Dated 7 June 1919" vol.2, 242-243.

[503] "Telegram from al-Sharif Hussein b. Ali Sheikh Muḥammad Taqī al-Hairi al-Shirāzī, dated 20 September 1919".

WWI. While incorporating some of the ideas Wilson idealised of the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles had far-reaching consequences for the international system. It formalised the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, while Britain maintained the Ottoman provinces were incapable of self-governance.[504]

Meanwhile on the ground in Iraq, Arnold Wilson grew increasingly displeased with al-Shirāzī, describing him as a man "the age of dementia surrounded by a group of wealth seekers who did not have consciences and only hoped to gain money by opposing the British".[505] Arnold Wilson later wrote "The priesthood of Karbalāʾ, Najaf and Kadhimain were, with notable exceptions, frankly hostile to secular government of whatever kind".[506] It became clear the British viewed Al-Shirāzī's actions as damaging to their interests in Iraq. Soon after, several members of the Islamic Association in Karbalāʾ were arbitrarily arrested. In August 1919, Shirāzī wrote to Arnold Wilson expressing his anger at the arrests and his desire to emigrate to Persia. In response, several clerics in Najaf wrote to Shirāzī pleading with him not to leave Iraq.[507] The impact of *fatwās* was now fully understood by the British and Wilson knew that even from Iran, al-Shirāzī could issue edicts capable of influencing dynamics in Iraq. Wilson's interactions with al-Shirāzī were less operative than with al-Yazdī. One example of this was Wilson's request that Shirāzī show support for the planned pact between British and Iranian governments, which Shirāzī refused. Another was Wilson's request that Shirāzī issue a *fatwā*

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[504] Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 5.

[505] F.O. 371/4148/89082 'From Political Officer, Baghdad, Dated 11 June 1919".

[506] Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920*, 253.

[507] "Telegram from the cleric of Najaf to Sheikh Muḥammad al-Shirāzī, dated 9 August 1919"; "Telegram from members of the Secret Party of Najaf and a group of youths from the city of Najaf to Sheikh Muḥammad al Shirāzī, Dated 9 August 1919". Quoting from Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 143.

prohibiting fighting British in Iran, also refused by al-Shirāzī.[508] Another example typifying the degree of British misperception of the *ʿulamā'* occurred when Wilson attempted to send large amounts of money to al-Shirāzī as consolation for not releasing detained members of the Islamic Association in Karbalāʾ. Al-Shirāzī refused to accept Wilson's money.[509]

Shīʿī Sacred Authority and the British Mandate of Iraq

Following the referendum, al-Shirāzī continued to support the cause of Iraqi independence by *fatwā*. In March 1920, to undermine the colonial occupation, he issued a *fatwā* forbidding Muslims from working for the British.[510] Islam became a force of unity in Iraq and a vehicle for Arab nationalism. Various Islamic societies and associations networked between shrine cities, using mosques as spaces for resistance activities which could not be interrupted by British intervention.

In April 1920 at the San Remo Conference, the British accepted the "sacred trust" of the League of Nations for the Mandate of Mesopotamia.[511] Its rejection across Iraqi society was widespread. According to Abdullah: "The mandate was denounced in almost every public

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[508] Abdu al-Razaq Al-Wahab, *Karbalāʾ Fi Al-Tarikh* (Karbalāʾ in History) Volume 3 (Baghdad: 1935): 59-60.

[509] Dashti, "The Shiite Resistance Against the British", 144.

[510] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41; "Letters from Sheik Muḥammad Taqī al-Hairi al-Shirāzī to tribal leaders in all parts of Iraq, calling for jihād and resistance to occupiers" (Qom: 2006).

[511] The notion of "sacred trust" traces back to British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain who described British colonial expansion as obligated as "trustees of civilisation for the commerce world. We offer in all these markets over which our flag floats the same opportunities. that we offer to our own subjects and upon the same terms". See Chowdhuri, *International Mandates and Trusteeships Systems*, 14. See also Charmian Edwards, *The Trusteeship Systems of the United Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1956).

place, be it in the mosques or the coffee houses of Baghdad. Sunnis and Shias demonstrated a rare sense of solidarity by sharing their places of worship to mobilise the population".[512] Fearing that Iraq would become part of the British Empire, Shirāzī issued a *fatwā* declaring "service in the British administration was unlawful".[513] After British rule came to Iraq in May 1920, al-Shirāzī issued another *fatwā*, declaring,

> It is the duty of the Iraqis to demand their rights. In demanding them they should maintain peace and order. But if the English prevent them from obtaining their rights, it is permitted to make use of defensive forces.[514]

In addition to al-Shirāzī's *fatwā*, anti-British sentiment was growing among nationalists in Baghdad and "disaffected mid-Euphrates tribal leaders.[515] At the end of Ramadan in July 1920, widespread, uncoordinated revolt broke out across Iraq, leading to the 1920 Iraqi Revolution which lasted until October with Britain only re-establishing full control of Iraq in February 1921.[516] Roughly 6000 Iraqis and 500 British and Indian soldiers died during the revolt.[517] It cost Britain £40 million pounds to re-establish control of Iraq.[518] Kadhim argues that directly and indirectly, the Revolution required 65,000 troops, claimed thousands of British casualties,

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[512] Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 203.

[513] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 41; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 32-33.

[514] Abd al-Halim al-Rahimi, *Al-haraka al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq: al-futher alfikriyya wa al-waqi' altarikhi (1900-24)* (The Islamic Movement in Iraq: Ideological Roots and Historical Situation, 1900-1924) (Beirut: Dar al-'alamiyya, 1985), 219.

[515] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 23.

[516] Dodge, "The Contradictions of Exogenous State-building in Historical Perspective", 192.

[517] Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 43.

[518] Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 40; Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered".

and cost the Britain closer to £100,000,000.[519] With the support of the British, Faisal was installed as Iraq's first king on 27 August 1921. British tutelage over Iraq was ratified just over a year through the October 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The treaty became the "back bone of Britain's indirect rule" of Iraq until its independence in October 1932.[520]

Assessing Clerical Authority and the British Mandate

The 1918 Najaf revolt and 1920 Revolution had several outcomes. First, it exposed the British's vast underestimation and misunderstanding of the clerical class in Iraq. Second, it enabled several factions of society including nationalists, tribal leaders and clerics to unify under the banner of Islam and mobilise through the use of shrine cities. Finally, it demonstrated the significance of religious authority and its sway over the tides of sovereignty claims in Iraq.

Several factors explain the advocacy of Najaf's clerical class during this time. First, frequent shrine visitation created a network of harmony between them, sustained by collective identity. Second, Shīʿītes refused to work in foreign or national governments lacking religious authority. Third, loyalty and obedience to religious authority of the Shīʿītes in Najaf were different than Iraqi Sunnīs who were loyal to the authority of the state, worked in government jobs and did not have religious leaders besides those appointed by the state.

[519] Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 1; Ernest Main, *Iraq: From Mandate to Independence* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935), 76.

[520] Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 26.

The clerical authority's *fatwās* were also critical to fostering resistance against the British imperialism. Despite al-Yazdī's engagement in various forms of institutional advocacy, he is described by nationalists as obstructing the independence movement. Alshamary argues that historical records of these events were coloured by the ideological dispositions of particular authors. She makes this point by reasoning that:

> The statement that Yazdi was ideologically predisposed to quietism or that he maintained a pro-British stance could be factually correct but it does not necessarily mean that Yazdi would have been opposed to the 1920 Revolution or that he would have provided less support than Shirāzī. If anything, his position – which Shirāzī latter inherits – simply means that no matter what his own opinions or pressures are, he has to adopt a position that preserves the institutional integrity of the hawza of Najaf first and foremost.[521]

Therefore, the period in question highlights the power of *fatwās* in pivoting the axes of international order and contesting imperial rule, including through grassroots mobilisation. It also emphasises the importance of institutional responsibility to elite clerics within Najaf's *ḥawza*. More broadly, the period illustrates the institutional integrity and restraint of the *ḥawza* during times of contestation. However, it also highlights the limits of self-determination in a racialised world order.

The Limits of Self-Determination in a Racialised World Order

The Mandate system at the core of the League of Nations ostensibly heralded the end of "European imperialism, territorial annexation and domination based on notions of cultural and racial superiority".[522] In the case of Iraq however, it arguably ushered in a new form of thinly

[521] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 125.

[522] Dodge, "International Obligation, Domestic Pressure and Colonial Nationalism" 144.

disguised imperialism. Although 'self-determination' does not appear in the actual Fourteen points, Wilson's speech introduced the principle as something which should apply not only to Europe but in many other geographies. Some scholars argue that the speech inspired decolonisation movements in the region, while others argue that the mandate system imposed by the League of Nations effectively maintained colonial control over Arab territories, and Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination did not reflect the reality of the time. Liberalism claims universality, but it has implicit and explicit forms of stratification. As such, Wilson's Fourteen points were aimed at unifying White Christianity.[523] What's interesting about the Fourteen points is its usage outside the Western world, despite its racism, by Arabic, Persian Shīʿītes and non-White Muslims to organise and advocate for self-determination through international society.

As Wilson's speech, at least in theory, advocated the right of self-determination to all peoples, it provided sustenance to Kurdish and Arab independences across the Middle East. In practice, however, the speech was tied up with a racialised view of world order.[524] Wilson's primary target was central Europeans and his speech, and subsequent policies, were in many ways of stratifying peoples following WWI.[525] In fact some within the British government blithely

[523] For thorough elaboration on this point of religious influence and intention, see Derek Heater, *National Self-Determination: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy* (New York: Palgrave, 1994); Niels A. Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 1875-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[524] For deeper interrogation of Wilson's conception of racial segregation and the nation state, see Gary Gerstle, "Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson", in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace*, ed. John M. Cooper (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 94-123; Richard W. Alstyne, "Woodrow Wilson and the Idea of the Nation State", *International Affairs* 37:3 (July 1961): 293-308.

[525] A longer strain of thinking of self-determination points to J.S. Mill's universal application for freedom and liberty; J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government* (New York: Dutton, 1910); J.S. Mill, "On Liberty" in *Utilitarianism*, ed. M. Warnock (Glasgow: Collins, 1962).

stated as much. In one Cabinet Committee meeting, Lord Curzon, then Lord President of Council declared the British would "play self-determination for all it is worth" to secure its imperial conquests.[526] However, the mandate system and subsequent revolt undermined this imperialistic ideology and impacted other imperial territories and decolonisation movements led by historical figures such as Ho Chi Ming, Mao Zedong and Jawaharlal Nehru.[527] Describing the 1920 revolt, Marr wrote: "Although the revolt did not achieve Iraqi independence or turn real authority over to the Iraqis, it did succeed in discrediting the India Office policy thoroughly, and it assured a much larger measure of participation by the Iraqis in their first national government".[528]

The Temporality of Najaf's Imperial Encounter

Recent scholarship on the events leading up to the 1920 revolt has argued that Iraq's state formation was an outcome of the imperial encounter. Hariri contends that "early state formation in Iraq should be conceptualised as the outcome of the colonial encounter – of the struggle between colonial power and local movements".[529] Hariri points out that studies often attribute too much historical agency to top-down imperial legacies, without factoring "how macro-colonial policies interacted with local dynamics to drive the process of state formation".[530]

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[526] Curzon in Eastern Committee Minutes, 5 Dec. 1918 Secret, Milner Papers, quoted in William R. Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 205.

[527] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[528] *Ibid*, 24.

[529] Aula Hariri, "State Formation as an Outcome of the Imperial Encounter: The Case of Iraq", *Review of International Studies* 45:5 (2019): 848-869, 849.

[530] *Ibid*, 858.

Through creative filtration and experiential cleaving, this chapter sought to combine a concern for imperial rule and trusteeship alongside local dynamics, with a specific focus on the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy during this critical period in the history of Iraq state-building.

The importance of the religious leaders in Najaf in the lead up to the 1920 revolt was not widely acknowledged until after the British involvement in Iraq in the 1990s and the coalition forces in 2003. Historically, the siege was seen as a precursor to the 1920 Arab Revolt. However, Haddad rightly contests this notion, describing the Najaf rebellion as,

> a localized affair that fed off the anti-British sentiments of the jihād movement. In other words, what ideological motivation that accompanied the rebellion still revolved around the Muslim/infidel dichotomy.[531]

As the British developed strong ties with the Iraqi monarchy, the study of an anti-British rebellion became less likely. The role of religious leaders was further diminished in favour of the pan-Arab nationalism movement that was sweeping the region.

Certain sources on the Najaf 1918 revolt were suppressed during Iraq's Baʿathist era, which portrayed it as a nationalist movement.[532] One important source was written by renowned Iraqi sociologist, Ali al-Wardi, who depicted the 1918 Najaf uprisings as Iraq's first anti-British revolution.[533] This perspective was suppressed due to the strong ties between the Iraqi

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[531] Farnar Haddad, "Political Awakenings in an Artificial State", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 6:1 (2012): 3-25.

[532] Eric Davis, *Memories of the State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[533] al-Wardi, *Lamahāt Ijtima'iyya min Tarikh al-'Iraq al-Ḥadīth*.

monarchy and the British. Kāmil al-Jubūrī emphasised the role of the clerical establishment during the Najaf uprisings and another on the Iraqi revolution.[534] He also wrote biographies on al-Yazdī and al-Shirāzī's role in shaping relations between Britain and local populations.[535] These biographies point out the *ḥawza*'s key role during the British occupation. Muḥammad Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's biography offers a first-hand experience of the Siege of Najaf in 1918.[536] In his memoirs, al-Ghiṭāʿ noted that despite the extensive literature available on these events, many details remain undisclosed, and facts remain unrecorded.[537]

Nationalist records of history downplayed the role of Najaf's *ḥawza*, portraying it as pro-British during the revolt. However, recent interpretations of primary sources reveal that the *ḥawza* was not unified in its stance during the revolt. Clerical leaders did not actively encourage the revolt, but young clerics formed a core component of the revolutionaries. Kadhim notes "The historiography of the 1920 Revolution has been another example of history written by the victors, the officials of the British administration and the successive Iraqi governments".[538] The Baaʿthist regime suppressed this information and portrayed it as a pan-Arab nationalist

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[534] Salmān Kāmil al-Jubūrī, *al-Najaf al-Ashraf wa-maqtal al-Kabtin Marshal, al-hakim al-siyasi al-Baritani 1918* (Holy City of Najaf and the Killing of Captain Marshall, the British Political Governor in 1918) (Beirut: Dār al-Qāri' lil-Tibā'ah wa-al-Tawzī', 2005); al-Jubūrī, *Watha'iq al-Thawra al-Iraqiya al-Kubra Muqadimatuha Wa Nata'ijuha, 1914-1923* (Documents Of Great Iraqi Revolution Introductions and Results) (Beirut: Dār al-Mu'arrikh al-'Arabī, 2009).

[535] Kāmil al-Jubūrī, *Sayid Muḥammad Kazim al-Yazdi Siratuh Wa'Adwa 'Ala Hayatih Wa Marji'iyatahu* (Muḥammad Kazim al-Yazdi: His Biography and Highlights on His Life, His Clerical Organization and His Positions) (Qom: Manshūrāt dhawī al-qubrá, 2006); Kāmil al-Jubūrī, *Sheikh Muḥammad Taqī al-Ha'iri al_Shirāzī Al-Qa'id Al'Ala lil al-Thawra al-Iraqiya al-Kubra 1920 Siratuh Wa Mqaqifuh Wa Watha'iq al-Siyasiya* (Sheikh Muḥammad Taqī al-Ha'iri al-Shirāzī Supreme Commander of Iraq's Great Revolution in 1920 and His Political Positions and Documentations) (Qom: Dhawi al-Qurbā, 2006).

[536] Muḥammad Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, *Uqud Min Hyati* (Decades of my Life) (Najaf: Madrasat wa Maktabat al-Imām, 2012).

[537] *Ibid*, 362.

[538] Kadhim, *Reclaiming Iraq*, 7.

movement.[539] Since the collapse of the Baaʿthist regime in 2003, the event has received renewed scholarly attention, with a particular focus on the religious authority. This renewed interest in the 1918 revolt is important for rediscovering Iraq's history and for understanding the clerical authority that serves as the central source of political claims-making emanating from Najaf.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the role of Najaf's clerical authority in the critical temporality leading up to the establishment of the British Mandate in 1920. The first section provided an overview of Najaf's history including its clerical establishment and *ḥawza* institution. The second section highlighted how British orientalism influenced their understanding of Najaf's clerical authority. The third section analysed the anti-colonial sentiments of the clerical authority at the start of WWI, the 1918 uprisings, the siege of Najaf and establishment of the League of the Islamic Awakening. The following section contextualised developments playing out at the Paris Peace Conference, and Woodrow Wilson's advocacy for self-determination and a 'League of Nations'. The final section examined Shirāzī's advocacy to the British and his engagement with Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen points. The chapter concluded by assessing clerical authority and the establishment of the British Mandate in Iraq.

The significance of Najaf's clerical authority is exemplified through the power of *fatwās*. Quintessential examples include the jihād *fatwās* of 1914 and 1920. As demonstrated, these forms of advocacy pivoted the axes of international order. Between these edicts, however, were

[539] Davis, *Memories of the State*.

a series of clerical manoeuvres demonstrating institutional responsibility and integrity. The following chapter will demonstrate how this pattern of clerical advocacy evolved in the 21st century, following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

Chapter Four: The Paradox of Clerical Advocacy: Self-Determination and Segmental Cleavages in Post-Invasion Iraq, 2003-2014

The previous chapter examined how Najaf's clerical authority unified various stratums of Iraqi society in resistance to British colonialism. It showed how *fatwās* were a powerful tool of clerical advocacy, capable of pivoting world politics. It demonstrated the emergence of a Shīʿī religio-political identity capable of directing future nation-building efforts. This chapter focuses on a different temporal context with similar themes to those a century earlier. These include: 1) pressures from imperial "occupying forces", 2) Shīʿī political mobilisation beyond the ḥawza, 3) *fatwās* for protection of sacred sites and political self-determination, and 4) clerical engagement with institutions of international society including the League of Nations and the United Nations. However, this chapter also addresses a new development not present in the previous chapter: the increase in sectarian animosities and violence on both sides of the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide, and the clerical establishment's unintentional role in enhancing the salience of sectarian identities.

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section examines Iraq's political field after regime change and the clerical authority's early discourses. This section highlights the clerical authority's rhetoric towards democracy and its compatibility with Islamic values. The second section provides an in-depth examination of clerical advocacy preceding and following the inaugural parliamentary elections in 2005. It underscores the role of the clerical establishment in promoting intersect harmony, while highlighting its unintentional sectarianism and continuation of Iraq's consociational elite bargain. The third section examines Iraq's descent into civil conflict between 2006-2009 and the clerical authority limited influence

in mitigating this violence. The final section delves into the context surrounding Sistānī's 2014 jihād *fatwā*. It outlines the intention of the *fatwā* as overt response to the rise of ISIS and an implicit response to Iran's growing presence in Iraq, while also discussing its unintended consequences. The chapter concludes by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the clerical authority's advocacy during this time.

A Temporal Approach to 21st Century Clerical Advocacy

The outline above canvasses the temporal approach of this thesis. It utilises experiential cleaving and creative filtration to concentrate on the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy between 2003-2014. To achieve temporal unity and durative presence, it insulates and focuses on instances of clerical advocacy, situating them within the broader context of local circumstances and international developments. It provides a meaningful synthesis of clerical advocacy in reference to confounding happenings following the US-led invasion such as the evolution of Iraq's political process and consequent sectarianisation of its political field. The chapter configures a set of disparate experiences: the evolution of the political process, the US's imposition of an elite political bargain, and the rise of sectarian violence, to portray the plot in such a way that its components meaningfully cohere and depict an intelligible series of the unintended consequences of clerical advocacy during this 'critical temporality'. Collectively, it presents a plot which synthesises heterogenous experiences into a meaningful series that is both enactable and normative.

The US-led invasion of Iraq created a vacuum fertile to extremist forces such as al-Qaeda in Iraq and, later ISIS. The rise of these groups increased sectarianism across the country, creating a new dimension of institutional responsibility. At the same time, Shīʿī political activism outside the *ḥawza* grew increasingly entrepreneurial. The *marjaʿiyya's* early discourses on democracy reveal the extent of consensus around popular sovereignty envisioned for Iraq, which contrasts to the heterogeneity within the Shīʿī *ʿulamā'* a century earlier. The 21st century *ḥawza* is more centralised and more bureaucratised than it was in the 20th century *ḥawza*.[540] This partly explains the uniformity of Najaf's clerical authority in their advocacy for democracy, inter-sect solidarity, and rejection of US occupation. Even clerics with Iranian sympathies were in lock step with Sistānī's messaging. This fostered more conformity within the *ḥawza*. However, outside the *ḥawza*, Shīʿī militias including Muqtada al-Ṣadr's Mahdi Army, the Badr Brigades, and Iran-backed militias such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous), Kataib Hezbollah (Brigades of God), forced the clerical establishment into familiar roles of mediation.[541] As Sayej writes,

> The ayatollahs must now compete with religious actors who do not seek legitimacy through an institutionalized religious hierarchy… It is by far the biggest challenge the ayatollahs have ever faced. No previous threat – not even the wrath of Saddam Hussein – had questioned the clerics' basic legitimacy or practice.[542]

While vigilante activism in the 20th century was coordinated primarily outside of the *ḥawza*, the League of the Islamic Awakening sought the guidance of clerical figures. In contrast, 21st

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[540] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests", 12.

[541] Dodge describes Ṣadr's Mahdi army as: "the most destructive non-state organisation striving to impose the victor's peace on Iraq". See Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 102.

[542] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs*, 22-23.

century Shīʿī politics in Iraq became increasingly divided between Muqtada al-Ṣadr's 'vocal' activism outside the *ḥawza*, and the more traditional role of Sistānī, operating within the *ḥawza*.[543] As put by Anthony Shadid, "If Ṣadr was a son of the street, Sistānī was a son of the seminary".[544] Muqtada al-Ṣadr's Mahdi Army gained support in Iraq by providing a more nationalistic movement than the Iranian-backed Shia forces, and a more hands-on alternative to the *ḥawza* approach.[545] Rather than any comparison in clerical erudition, these frequent comparisons between al-Ṣadr and Sistānī were made because of US interest in Iraq and Ṣadr's militant power following the US-led invasion. Sistānī's representative Muḥammad ali Shirāzī stated: "It's truly dreadful when you hear the media compare Muqtada al-Ṣadr and Ayatollah Sistānī. It's like comparing a turnip to a king".[546]

The Fall of Saddam and the Renaissance of Najaf

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq created a power vacuum that was exploited by a variety of actors both local and transnational with varying agendas. The *ḥawza* in Najaf, which had been systematically oppressed under Baʿathist Iraq, gained significant influence following the invasion. Kadhum describes the pre-2003-2005 temporal context as characterised by "Shi'a

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[543] For an extensive account of Muqtada al-Ṣadr's rise in Iraq's post-invasion political sphere, see Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

[544] Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 187.

[545] Fabrice Balanche, "From the Iranian Corridor to the Shia Crescent", *Hoover Institute*, 2021, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-03175780/file/From_the_Iranian_Corridor_to_the_Shia_Cr.pdf; Andrew L. Peek, "The Immutable Muqtada al-Ṣadr Loses a Battle Against Iran", *Atlantic Council*, 22 June 2022, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-immutable-muqtada-al-Ṣadr-loses-a-battle-against-iran/.

[546] "Sistānī: Object of Emulation – Iraq", *YouTube*, 22 August 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODOdTTntMF0.

redemption, vindication, and a rise in Shi'a political consciousness".[547] As discussed in Chapter Two, while these temporal categories applied to Shīʿī diaspora seeking mobilisation, Iraq's political field was becoming increasingly sectarianised. This presented a dual challenge for the clerical establishment as the Shīʿī majority saw the post-2003 period as a time for Shīʿī revival following decades of persecution, while the country was also grappling with increased sectarianism on the streets and within the structures of its fledgling political institutions.

Iraq's Political Field after Regime Change

Before elaborating further on Najaf's clerical authority and its engagement with world politics, it is first necessary to offer some context to Iraq's post-invasion political sphere. Dodge and others describe Iraq's political system after regime change as built around "exclusive elite-bargaining".[548] This scenario involved unspoken understandings between elites on various political, economic and military issues, to bring leadership to dominant groups within a society. This elite bargain excluded the old ruling elite and the whole Sunnī section of stratum of society, exacerbating social antagonism and violence.[549] The elite bargain in Iraq "divided society into religious and ethnic groups".[550] For this reason, Dodge makes the point that the

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[547] Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet", 7-9.

[548] Dodge, *Iraq*, 40; Toby Dodge, "Enemy Images, Coercive Socio-Engineering and Civil War in Iraq", *International Peacekeeping* 19:4 (2012): 461-477; Haithem K. Sawaan, "The Corruption of Political Elites in Iraq – an Economic Analysis", *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5:1 (2012): 107-127; Bilal B. Bag, "Analysing the Onset of the Iraqi Civil War 2004 From the Perspective of Inclusive and Exclusive Elite Bargains", *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 4:1 (2017): 44-64; Siân Herbert, "Who are the Elite Groups in Iraq and How do They Exercise Power", *K4D Helpdesk Report – UK Institute of Development Studies* (2018): 1-14; Hamzeh al-Shadeedi and Erwin Van Veen, "Iraq's Adolescent Democracy: Where to Go From Here", *Clingendael Institute* (2020), 13-16.

[549] Dodge, *Iraq*, 47.

[550] *Ibid*, 47-48.

"socio-political causes of violence, from 2003 onwards, are secondary and dependent upon the collapse of the state's coercive and institutional capacity".[551] Ultimately, this political system incentivised and rewarded the adoption of sectarian identities.[552]

Dodge later revised the elite bargain *Muhasasa Tai'fiya* (sectarian appointment) as an informal consociational bargain.[553] Using Bourdieau's three forms of capital (symbolic, social and economic), he argues that the foundations of the consociational bargain were laid at an Iraqi opposition conference held in the town of Salahuddin in 1992.[554] The group devised quotas based on the ethnic and religious demographics of Iraq which would inform US decision-makers after the 2003 invasion, and also impose a symbolic violence on the "whole of Iraqi society".[555] Consociationalism scholars argue that societies seen as divided by "segmental

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[551] *Ibid*, 55.

[552] There is a growing literature on sectarianism and sectarian identities which ultimately fell outside the scope of this thesis. Farnar Haddad is a leading scholar on sectarianism who recently outlined reasons for discarding the term "sectarianism" in place of "sectarian identity". See Farnar Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism': Sunni-Shi'a Relations in the Modern Arab World* (London: Hurst & Co., 2020).

[553] See Toby Dodge, "Iraq's Informal Consociationalism and its Problems", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 20:2 (2020): 145-152; Toby Dodge, "The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq: The Role of Consociationalism and Political Settlements", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15:4 (2021): 459-475.

[554] Dodge, "The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 463; Bourdieu's depiction of symbolic capital shows how people unknowingly internalise analytical categories by complying with institutional rules or repeated practices. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital", in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-258; For more on this exiled group, see George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 112-170.

[555] Dodge, "The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 465; Pierre Bourdieu, "Symbolic Power" *Critique of Anthropology* 4:13 (1979): 77-85, 80; There is a vast literature on Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic capital and violence that lies outside the scope of this thesis. For clarity, it is worth mentioning Siisiäinen's definition of symbolic violence as: "the violence which is exercised upon social agent with his or her complicity… social agents are knowing agents who, even when they are subjected to determinisms, contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines

cleavages" cannot build stable democratic systems, and that "segmental pluralism" in consociational systems would "encourage political elites to mediate between segmental groups".[556] Dodge argues that this failed because elites pursued informal consociationalism, deploying symbolic capital to persuade Iraq's population that it would "benefit from recognising ethnic and religion division as a key organising trope for post-regime change politics".[557] In doing so, elites presented artificial sectarian divisions as natural "segmental cleavages", justifying the structure of the political settlement and their role in its hierarchy.[558] The clerical authority's accumulation of symbolic, social and cultural capital in the religious field invariably shaped Iraq's emerging political field.

Clerical Authority and Challenges to Najaf's *Ḥawza*

Scholars have drawn parallels between the 1920 Revolution and the period following the US-led invasion. Nearly a century later the clerical authority in Najaf chose not to negotiate with occupying forces. Instead, it sought recognition through the UN. Faced with the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq and ISIS, Najaf's clerical authority maintained a position of interhuman solidarity seeking inter-sect harmony. One temporal pattern between this period and colonial

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them". See Martti Siisiäinen, "Symbolic Power as a Critical Concept" in *Symbolic Power in Cultural Contexts: Uncovering Social Reality*, eds. Jarmo Houtsonen and Ari Antikainen (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008), 11-22, 13.

[556] Dodge, The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 460; Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[557] Dodge, The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 461.

[558] In effect, these elites assumed that Iraq's perceived "segmental cleavages" were immutable truths of Iraqi society. See *Ibid*, 463.

Britain's 20th century tutelage in Iraq was the US's establishment of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) in January 2003.

The OHRA was established by the US in the months preceding the invasion of Iraq. The organisation was intended to serve as a caretaker administration until democratic election could be held and a civilian government could be formed. Retired US Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner was appointed as the first director of the OHRA. He was particularly influenced by the exiled parties seeking to impose their elite consociational bargain on Iraq's political field.[559] On 19 March 2003, the US-led invasion of Iraq began, and coalition forces captured Baghdad in early April. In military terms, the invasion was a tactical success. Politically however, the invasion proved tremendously destructive to the social and political fabric of Iraq.

In early May 2003, Jay Garner was replaced by Paul Bremer as head of the OHRA, which was later transformed into the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Bremer, an experienced diplomat, began his foreign service career 1966 with a two-year posting to Afghanistan.[560] He left the foreign service in 1989 and joined Kissinger and Associates, a global consulting firm founded by Henry Kissinger. However, he had never participated in a joint civilian-military operation, had little experience in international development, had never served in the Middle East, and did not speak Arabic. Before departing for Iraq, Bremer reportedly stated to a group

[559] Dodge, "The Contradictions of Exogenous State-building in Historical Perspective", 196.

[560] "L. Paul Bremer III Oral History", *Miller Center*, 28 August 2012, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/l-paul-bremer-iii-oral-history.

of businessmen in the US: "We're going to be running a colony in Iraq".[561] This highlights the imperial mindset that individuals such as Bremer were taking to their occupation of Iraq, which in some ways reflects the British a century earlier.

Upon his appointment, Bremer was given broad powers to govern by decree until a civilian government could be formed. At the direction of US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Bremer's role as administrator was to "oversee, direct and coordinate all executive, legislative and judicial functions necessary to temporarily govern Iraq, including humanitarian relief and reconstruction and assisting in the formation of an Iraqi interim authority".[562] Sajey and others argued that during the reconstruction period, Ambassador Bremer acted as modern 'viceroy' of Iraq.[563] Associated with colonialism and conquest, he assumed this pejorative term because of his position as CPA administrator and lack of accountability to the Iraq people. Among his first actions as Iraq's executive authority were the banning of the Baʿath party and the dismantling of the Iraqi Army on 16 and 23 May respectively.[564] These actions were followed

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[561] 15 years later Bremer conceded this was a "bad choice of words". See "Did the US Occupation Create ISIL?", *YouTube*, 5 December 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7xfS3LXSOk&t=1612s.

[562] "Coalition Provisional Authority CFLCC-ORHA APO AE 09304", *US Department of Defence*, 22 May 2003,https://web.archive.org/web/20111126160610/https://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/operation_and_plans/CPA_ORHA/Doc_128_CPA_Legal_Instruments.pdf.

[563] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs*, 47; Jonathon Steele, "The Viceroy of Baghdad", *The Guardian*, 23 April 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/apr/23/iraq.jonathansteele; Fred Hiatt, "A Viceroy's Farewell Calls", *The Washington Post*, 20 June 2004, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2004/06/20/a-viceroys-farewell-calls/8ff38aa4-4402-4dd4-aa22-62195a0e964a/.

[564] "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1: De-Baʿathification of Iraqi Society", *CPA*, 16 May 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20040621014307/http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030516_CPAORD_1_De-Ba_athification_of_Iraqi_Society_.pdf; Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2: Dissolution of Entities", *CPA*, 23 May 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20040701202042/http://iraqcoalition.org/regulations/20030823_CPAORD_2_Dissolution_of_Entities_with_Annex_A.pdf.

by three weeks of uncontrollable looting, violence and kidnappings across the country, which Secretary Rumsfeld infamously dismissed as "stuff happens".[565]

Bremer's policy of 'De-Baʿathification' and dissolution of the Army left over 350,000 soldiers without employment and deprived Iraq of essential state security structures.[566] Disbanding the army and dismissing thousands decimated Iraq's security institution, created an institutional power vacuum which contributed to the collapse of Iraq's state capacity.[567] Patel makes the point that in comparison to the CPA's 'De-Baʿathification' policy, "the effects of the looting have been underappreciated and understudied".[568] These problems led to civil unrest and escalated sectarian violence, creating significant challenges for Najaf's clerical authority. Meanwhile, the *ʿulamā'* sought to free Iraq of foreign occupation, while recognising the dangers of sectarian discontent and the difficulties in successfully building the state's

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[565] Dodge, "The Contradictions of Exogenous State-building in Historical Perspective", 188; Stephen Benedict Dyson, "Stuff Happens": Donald Rumsfeld and the Iraq War", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5:4 (2009): 327-347; "Liberation and Looting in Iraq", *Human Rights Watch*, 13 April 2003, https://www.hrw.org/news/2003/04/13/liberation-and-looting-iraq-0.

[566] For a thorough account of Bremer's administration of the Coalition Provisional Authority see James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Benjamin Runkle and Siddharth Mohandas, "Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority", *RAND Corporation – National Security Research Division* (2009): 1- 412; Hanny Megally, Hania Mufti and Eric Stover, "Bremer's "Gordian Knot": Transitional Justice and the US Occupation of Iraq", *Human Rights Quarterly* 27 (2005): 830-857; For Bremer's autobiographical account, see L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 203-213.

[567] Dodge, *Iraq*, 38.

[568] David S. Patel, *Order Out of Chaos: Islam, Information, and the Rise and Fall of Social Orders in Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 43; The CPA later estimated that the looting cost Iraq $12 billion. See Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 44; For more on the impacts of the looting, see Noah Feldman, *What We Owe Over Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 52; Allawi writes "it subsequently became established that the more targeted and purposeful looting was organised by insiders, either from former ministers or in former security agencies. The objectives were manifold, and included sowing the seeds of administrative chaos and disorganisation, and monetary gain. In many ministries, individual managers were responsible for organising and directing theft". See Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 117.

institutional capacities.[569] In light of this, Sistānī and Najaf's clerical authority issues a number of statements urging calm and restraint, encouraging a democratic political process for Iraq.

Sistānī was particularly concerned with maintaining order in Iraq. He utilised his symbolic, social and cultural capital to address various issues afflicting Iraqi society. In an effort to avoid civil violence, a letter from Sistānī's office in April 2003 read:

> His Eminence's advice is to save lives and properties, uphold law and order, join ranks, and reject sectarian and ethnic discords and conspiracies. He also expressed his utter disappointment with the looting and ransacking of many public properties and the homes of defenceless civilians.[570]

Before the US-led invasion, Shīʿī Friday prayers were not a common form of information transmission. Patel argues that once the Ṣadr and his close network began hosting Friday prayers to speak in the name of the *ḥawza*, Sistānī had no choice but to organise Friday sermons of his own.[571] Patel questions the proactiveness of Sistānī's *fatwās*, arguing that they were "sanctioning already established patterns of behaviour towards looters".[572] For example, Sistānī emphasised the significance preserving private property and respecting law and

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[569] Describing this challenge, Dodge wrote: "the twin problem of building institutional capacity while at the same time promoting indigenous ownership is a tension at the heart of international attempts at state building". See Toby Dodge, *Iraq's Future: The Aftermath of Regime Change* (Oxford: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005), 17.

[570] The office of H.E. Grand Ayatollah Sistānī, 15 April 2003. Ali-al-Sistānī, "The communiqué issued by the supreme religious authority of the Shia world, His Eminence Ayatullah Al-Udhma al-Sayyid al-Sistānī on the current situation in Iraq" under statements", [cited Safa 1424 (18 April 2003)].

[571] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 67.

[572] *Ibid*, 70-71.

upholding law and order. He acknowledged the void led by the US invasion and the need for state legitimacy. In another statement from April 2003, Sistānī said:

> In the absence of a central authority to govern the country – leading to widespread anarchy and breakdown in law and order – we urge the active participation of our pious brethren everything, including those living through the events unfolding in our beloved Iraq, to fill the current vacuum with suitable and devout people… The main priority of such councils has to be the removal of all weapons from the hands of the general public.[573]

A fundamental difference between Ṣadr and Sistānī was their stance on the role of militias in Iraqi society. Until his 2014 *jihād fatwā*, Sistānī consistently rejected the formation of militias as detrimental to Iraq's state capacity building efforts, whereas clerics outside the *ḥawza* such as Muqtada al-Ṣadr established powerful militias. Both Sistānī and Ṣadr generally agreed on religious matters that dominate the lives of clerics.[574] Neither advocated for an Islamic state modelled on Iran's *velāyat-e faqīh* system, and both grew increasingly dissatisfied with the US occupation.[575] While Ṣadr directed his frustrations militarily towards US forces, Sistānī focused on advocating for the UN to assume a greater role in Iraq's reconstruction. Importantly, the *marjaʿiyya* used the UN as a benchmark for legitimacy and sought frequent collaborative reform through its institutions.

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[573] Ali-al-Sistānī, "Iraq Relief" under statements" (2003) [cited Safa 1424 (22 April 2003)] [cited 19 Safar 1424 (22 April 2003)].

[574] Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, 189-190.

[575] *Ibid*.

Unhappy with US involvement, Sistānī requested that the UN send an envoy to investigate the political situation in Iraq to evaluate the feasibility of holding elections.[576] Sistānī was well aware of the potential role that the UN could play in Iraq's reconstruction, citing the UN's supervision of elections in East Timor as a model for Iraq.[577] Sistānī and the *marjaʿiyya*'s strong opposition to the US and deference to a UN mandate, significantly diminished Washington's role in Iraq's reconstruction process. While Sistānī led the calls for UN involvement in Iraq's reconstruction efforts, several elite clerics expressed also support for a democratic process in Iraq.

Al-Hakim, SCIRI in Iraq's Religious and Political Field

The Hakim family played a key role in Political Shīʿīsm in Iraq, establishing the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). In Autumn 1958, the Daʿwah Party was established in Karbalāʾ which aimed to create an Islamic state in Iraq.[578] Muhammad Bāqir al-Hakim was one its early leaders. While in exile in Iran in 1982, al-Hakim created the SCIRI which advocated for regime change in Iraq and promoted Iran's *velāyat-e faqīh* system. According to Allawi, al-Hakim became the groups spokesperson and asserted "his undivided control over the organisation and was able to mould the institution to his purposes".[579] During

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[576] Juan Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006): 5-27, 16; Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Baʿathist Iraq", *United States Institute of Peace* (June 2007): 1-23; Ahmed al-Rahim, "The New Iraq: The Sistani Factor", *Journal of Democracy* 16:3 (July 2005): 50-53; Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Ayatollah Democracy", *The Atlantic*, September 2004, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/09/ayatollah-democracy/303423/; Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam and Shiʿi Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani", *International Political Science Review* 33:2 (2012): 193-208.

[577] Riccardo Bocco, Hamit Bozarslan, Peter Sluglett and Jordi Tejel, *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographies and Political Challenges* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2012), 316.

[578] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 27.

[579] *Ibid*, 44.

the Iran-Iraq War, the SCIRI functioned as an extension of Iranian goals and strategies. It effectively organised Iraqi prisoners of war into a proficient and well-equipped military force known as the Badr Corps, which was initially commanded by officers from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.[580]

The SCIRI's transformation from a broad platform for Iraq's Islamists to a more personalised organisation cantered around a single leader raised doubts about its political agenda and its place within Iraq's Islamist heritage. Bāqir al-Hakim acknowledged the shared interests between SCIRI and the Iranian revolution but emphasized that its roots predated the Iranian Islamic movement by decades. These complex foundations and political orientations were a key point of difference between SCIRI and Najaf's *marjaʿiyya* in post-invasion Iraq. Days before Bremer's arrival in Baghdad on 12 May, Bāqir al-Hakim made the fateful decision to return to Iraq.[581]

Acknowledging that the notion of *velāyat-e faqīh* would face resistance from both the majority of Iraqis and the Coalition, he proposed an alternative framework for Islamist political organisation. Allawi explains,[582]

> His proposal, which he appeared to have deliberated with prominent Ayatollahs in Najaf, including Ayatollah Sistani, aimed to refine the concept of the *Marji'iyya*, endowing it with two distinct roles: one centred on religion and spirituality, and the other focused on politics.

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[580] *Ibid*.

[581] *Ibid*, 111.

[582] *Ibid*.

The challenge was to establish a religiously endorsed position for himself as a political *Marja'*. This political *Marja'* would possess the authority to issue binding rulings, yet remain subservient, regarding matters of religious doctrine, to the traditional *Marja al-Taqlid*. This approach ensures that the established institutions of the Shīʿa *Maraji'* remain unaltered by their direct engagement in politics. Simultaneously, the preeminent Shīʿa political figure would receive training in the *ḥawza*, along with firsthand experience and expertise in the realm of politics.[583]

Unlike Sistānī and the quietist leanings of Najaf's clerical authority, Muhammad Bāqir and SCIRI explicitly involved themselves in politics and advocated for clerical rule. The group represented a political and activist variant of Iraqi Shīʿīsm. In contrast, Sistānī and Najaf's religious establishment historically avoided direct participation in politics. The *marjaʿiyya* see their role as providing moral and spiritual guidance to followers rather than exercising temporal authority. However, as will be seen, the *marjaʿiyya* are not entirely apolitical. Sistānī took a more active role after the fall of Saddam, calling for democratic reforms and elections. But he aimed to avoid daily governance and explicit partisanship. The *marjaʿiyya* thus derive authority from their perceived independence and religious legitimacy.

Although al-Hakim (1939-2003) spent time in exile in Iran and was sympathetic to the Khomeini's theocratic model, he expressed support and advocacy for a democratic process in

[583] *Ibid*, 112.

Iraq. In a June 2003 interview with Der Spiegel, al-Hakim expressed support for greater popular sovereignty through democracy than what was proposed by the US' council format:

> We do not want a dictator, one man party or a one-party state. Iraq will be a democratic state, in which the rights of all the groups in society will be respected. It will be a state in which the values of Islam and all the other religions will be respected and served.[584]

There was a consistent belief among Sistānī, al-Hakim and the Daʿwah party that Islamic values were compatible with democracy. Unity on the issue of Islamic governance's compatibility with democracy ensured the *ʿulamā'*s role in Iraq reconstruction process. Al-Hakim made his point clear declaring: "We must spare no effort to end the presence of the occupying forces in Iraq as soon as possible. But our priority is political, not military".[585] This was an important clarification for al-Hakim because he had created the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which had a powerful military wing. The Badr Brigades, created by Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), had up to 10,000 men.[586] It seemed as though Al-Hakim's position had changed significantly since he formed the SCIRI. At that time, he advocated a "political and religious marja" to lead an Islamic revolution in Iraq".[587] Despite his previous support and advocacy for the *velāyat-e faqīh* system, al-Hakim supported popular sovereignty in Iraq. Sayej noted that after developing ties to US-backed opposition groups and

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[584] Bernhard Zand, "Amerika ist parteiisch", *Der Spiegel*, 7 June 2003.

[585] *Ibid*.

[586] For a useful background on the SCIRI and Badr Brigades, see Nadejda Marinova, "Theocracies and Exiles: Tehran and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq", in *Ask What You Can Do For Your (New) Country: How Host States Use Diasporas*, ed. Nadejda Marinova (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 236-259.

[587] Muḥammad Bāqiral-Hakim, *'Aqidiatuna wa ru'yatuna al-siyasiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Muhajjah al-Bayda, 2009), 18. Quoting from Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs,* 102.

attending opposition conferences in London in 2001, "Hakim's new position was crystallizing".[588] In doing so, al-Hakim regained stature in the hierarchy of Najaf's *ḥawza*.

To dismantle the Baʿathist regime, it was necessary to draft a new constitution that would protect the rights of all peoples equally. On 23 June 2003, Sistānī issued a *fatwā* emphasising the importance of forming a committee that would "draft a constitution that conforms with the highest interests of the Iraqi people and would express its national identity, one basis of which is the pure Islamic religion and noble social values".[589] Sistānī was of the view that such a draft constitution would then be put to a national referendum.

According to Cole, "Sistānī saw governmental legitimacy as deriving from two sources. One was the seal of approval (*al-imda*) given by the grand ayatollahs in Najaf. The other is the approval or agreement of the people through a general election".[590] From this, it is reasonable to conclude that Sistānī played a crucial role in shaping popular opinion in Iraq while also dedicating resources to advocating Iraqi independence to the international community. However, Patel paints a more intricate picture arguing, "The authority of Shiʿi clerics is self-fulfilling. It might appear that grand ayatollah's fatwas are always followed, but this is at least partly because they tend to only issue those they are confident will be obeyed".[591] This quote

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[588] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs*, 103.

[589] "Ḥawzat al-Naaf Tasdur Fatwā did Qanun al-Jinsiyyah al'Iraqiyyah", *ash-Sharq al-Awsat,* 7 October 2003.

[590] Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq*, 11.

[591] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 124.

illustrates the difficult situation Sistānī faced within the clerical authority, and future instances of advocacy confirm this pattern.

On 26 June 2003, Sistānī issued another *fatwā* directly rebuking the US for driving the Iraqi reconstruction effort towards their own interests. He wrote:

> Those forces [United States] have no jurisdiction whatsoever to appoint members of the Constitution assembly. Also there is no guarantee either that this assembly will prepare a constitution that serves the best interests of the Iraqi people or express their national identity whose backbone is sound Islamic religion and noble social values. The said plan is unacceptable from the outset. First of all there must be a general election so that every Iraqi citizen – who is eligible to vote – can choose someone to represent him in a foundational Constitution preparation assembly. Then the drafted Constitution can be put to a referendum.[592]

Legitimacy was central to Sistānī for several seasons. First, he ascribed the necessity of a "monopoly over violence" by the state, dismissing non-state actors and militia forces. Sistānī saw the presence of Iranian-backed Shīʿa militias in Iraq's state security infrastructure as problematic.[593] Essentially outsourcing the state's vital security infrastructure to another state's military would inevitably give Iran a strategic foothold into Iraq that would not necessarily align with Iraqi national interests or Islamic jurisprudence. Additionally, Sistānī viewed the sectarian methods deployed by Iran's militias as divisive. Overt sectarianism was also amplified by the violence of al-Ṣadr's militias.[594] By alienating Iraqi Sunnīs from the political

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[592] "Document 582: Fatwā of Grand Ayatollah Ali-al-Sistānī 26 June 2003".

[593] Sistānī response to *New York Times* questions, July 28, 2003.

[594] *Ibid*.

process, the emerging elite bargain was driving Iraq's Sunnī communities towards militant groups.

Sistānī consistently maintained that the presence of US forces in Iraq was illegitimate, referring to them as 'occupying forces'.[595] Instead, He emphasised the authority of the UN as "central to establishing security and stability in Iraq during the transitional stage".[596] Sistānī's stance was that any actions taken in Iraq should be done under the mandate of the UN. He viewed forces that entered Iraq without UN recognition as occupiers, while those with a UN mandate were acceptable. For example, in reference to the prospect of Japanese forces assisting Iraqi forces with state security, he said: "the Iraqi people can look positively to its coming if it is conducted under the umbrella of the United Nations and if it provides the conditions suitable to hold public elections".[597] Sistānī's consistent rhetoric of authority through UN mandate challenged the legitimacy of US forces in Iraq and illustrates the religious authority's collaborative approach to reform through international institutions.

It is evident the *ʿulamā*'s engagement with institutions of international society such as the UN and, earlier, approaches to the League of Nations, that the relationship between the clerical authority and the international system is more complex than commonly depicted as inherently rejecting of the international system. Sistānī engaged frequently in meditations with the UN, while simultaneously rejecting overtures from the US for direct dialogue. In an interview with

[595] Sistānī retained and accumulated considerable symbolic, social and cultural capital by constantly refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the US occupation.

[596] Sistānī response to *Le Nouvel Observateur* questions, August 29, 2003.

[597] Sistānī response to *Japanese Economy* questions, July 28, 2003.

al-Hilli in 2018, Sistānī confirmed that he refused to meet with US representatives, constantly referring to them as "occupying forces".[598] This preference for the UN as an international institution and rejection of the US as an imperial power highlights the clerical authority's willingness to engage in the nitty gritty of international relations.

During Bremer's tenure as administrator of the CPA, Sistānī and the Iraqi *ḥawza* had a particularly contentious relationship with the US. Sistānī took issue with Bremer's sectarian-based presumptions about Iraq's social composition, and his fixation on capitalist expansion as the basis for Iraq's future. Upon his arrival in Iraq, Bremer prescribed an ethno-sectarian and economic-based model, that aligned with neoliberal ideals underpinning US global hegemony such as free-market capital democratisation and the establishment of corporate and private state-owned enterprises.[599] Bremer reportedly stated, "If we don't get their economy right no matter how fancy our political transformation, it won't work".[600] Discussing Bremer's intentions in Iraq, Sayej aptly concludes: "He cared about setting up a free-trade zone hub that would benefit the international community".[601] Another significant issue the clerical class had with Bremer's plan for Iraq was its lack of Islamic frameworks.

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[598] Yousif Al-Hilli, "The International Community in the Eyes of Ayatollah Al-Sistānī: Attitudes Towards the United Nations and the U.S.A. Post 2003", *US-China Law Review* 19:3 (2022): 114-124.

[599] Dodge argues that these ideological neoliberal measures of state reform were the most important reason for the failure of the initial occupation. See Toby Dodge, "Iraqi Transitions: From Regime Change to State Collapse", *Third World Quarterly* 26:4 (2005): 707-721. See also, Toby Dodge, "The Sardinian, the Texan and the Tikriti: Gramsci, The Comparative Autonomy of the Middle Eastern State and Regime Change in Iraq", *International Politics* 43 (2006): 453-473.

[600] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs*, 46.

[601] *Ibid*.

In November 2003, the US proposed a caucus-based system using municipal and provincial governing councils, despite the widespread call for a nationwide democratic election among clerical leaders.[602] A representative of SCIRI told Western news, "This agreement lacks any reference to the respect of the Islamic identity of most of the Iraqi population and the guarantee of the rights of other religions and sects".[603] Sistānī held a similar view which he articulated to the Washington Post. In response to Bremer's caucus proposal, he said,

> The instrumentality envisaged in it for electing the members of the transitional legislature does not guarantee the formation of a parliament that truly represents the Iraqi people. It must be changed to some other method, which would guarantee it. And that is elections, such that the parliament would derive from the will of the Iraqis and would represent them in a just manner and will safeguard it from any challenge to its legitimacy.[604]

This position was not solely motivated by self-interest, but rather by the demographic reality of Iraq, where 96% of the population is Muslim. Other clerical leaders, such as Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim (1950-2006), also spoke out in support of democratic elections. In an interview with PBS News in December 2003, al-Hakim emphasised the importance of inclusivity and solidarity among different religious and ethnic groups in Iraq. He also stressed the need for a government that respected the Islamic identity of the majority of the population, while also guaranteeing the rights of other religions and sects. When discussing Arab Sunnīs in Iraq, al-Hakim stated:

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[602] For the US proposal, see "Agreement on Political Process", *Global Policy Forum*, 15 November 2003, https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/document/2003/1115nov15agreement.htm.

[603] "Iraqi Shiites Unhappy with 'Unclear' Agreement on Handover of Power", *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 20 November 2003.

[604] Anthony Shadid and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Cleric Renews Call for Iraq Elections", *Washington Post*, 29 November 2003. It is worth noting that Anthony Shadid had a special relationship with Sistani, being the only American journalist whom Sistānī communicated *fatwās* to.

> We do not want them to be left out. We want them to be part of the government or the rule of the country… They should actively participate or contribute to all the governing formations and the decision making in Iraq.[605]

Outside Iraq, there was growing concerns the government could turn into a theocratic state similar to Iran, and that the country would descend into sectarian violence. Al-Hakim directly addressed these concerns. When asked about the nature of the Islamic government al-Hakim envisioned for Iraq, he replied:

> We don't want an Islamic government. We want a constitutional government that preserves the rights of everybody and a Government that believes in the public rights; a government that works for the interests of the Iraqi people, and believes that the people are a source to derive all important decisions that concern the future of the Iraqi people.[606]

This statement echoes the sentiment expressed by al-Hakim's brother Mohammad Bāqir earlier in the year, that Najaf's clerical authority did not seek direct political power. The interviewer then suggested that the 1920s were a period of inter-sect harmony, contrasting with other periods of history marked by significant "strain and stress between the sects". Al-Hakim rejected this framing of history, emphasising that it was not helpful to view the situation in Iraq through a sectarian lens:

> We can't say that there has been stress between the two sects throughout history. On the contrary, there was a kind of peaceful coexistence between the Sunnis and Shiites. There were Shiites marrying Sunnis, and vice versa. Shiites and Sunnis worked together, and they went to the same

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[605] "Beyond Baghdad: Interview Abdul Aziz al-Hakim", *PBS Frontline*, 3 December 2003, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/beyond/interviews/hakim.html.

[606] *Ibid*.

> schools, they went to the same universities. This coexistence and relationship between the two sects is good.[607]

Al-Hakim attributed episodes of sectarian violence to the state structures that were embedded in Baʿathist Iraq which encouraged such behaviour. He consistently stressed the unity of the Iraqi people, with the shared goal of ending the occupation and forming government. Despite this, Al-Hakim was careful not to criticise al-Ṣadr, despite acknowledging "different points of view" within the Shīʿa community. Specifically referring to Ṣadr, al-Hakim replied:

> There are no great differences or severe differences as you said, because everybody believes in the need to end the occupation and to establish a national government and elected national government – that there should be a permanent constitution for the country, and that law and order should be back to Iraq. We all believe in those principles.[608]

Al-Hakim actively engaged in public diplomacy, meeting German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in December 2003. After the meeting, a Lebanese broadcaster reported al-Hakim had:

> renewed his support for a bigger UN role in bringing democracy back to Iraq. Following his meeting with Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in Berlin, Al-Hakim said that he aims to establish a democratic and free state in Iraq that respects all religions and human rights.[609]

Despite al-Hakim's public diplomacy efforts disavowing sectarianism, this argument is open to dispute. The SCIRI proposal and its role in drafting the constitution for a federal region in

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[607] *Ibid*.

[608] *Ibid*.

[609] "LBC: IGC's Al-Hakim Meets Schroeder, Renews Support for 'Bigger UN role' in Iraq", Beirut, *LBC Satellite Television*, 18 December 2003. Quoting from Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq*, 15.

southern Iraq along with its central role in the creation of Iraq's post-2003 political system, the *Muhasa Ta'ifia* enshrined sectarian identity as a foundational element of the country's political system.[610] At the same time, Sistānī's nominal quietism and anti-sectarian rhetoric misdirected many from his more nuanced conception of the role of clerical authority. To substantiate this point, it is necessary to highlight a set of meetings that took place between Professor Abdul Aziz Sachedina and Sistānī' in 1998.

Sachedina met Sistānī' in Iraq in 1998. During these meetings, Sistānī' revealed some "vigorous opinions on the primacy of the *Marji'* in matters of doctrine".[611] Allawi notes,[612]

> Far from being the detached and ethereal figure of the imagined 'quietest' tradition…Sistani emerges as someone who is vitally concerned with the role of Islam in state and society, and one who does not advocate a benign negligence or avoidance of all things to do with the state or government.

Ayatollah Sistānī was decidedly not in favour of a detached *marjaʿiyya*, one that remained aloof from matters of the state and worldly power, focused solely on guiding Shīʿī Muslims in their religious duties within the secular realm. Nor did he exhibit a narrow sectarian outlook. He emphatically conveyed to Sachedina that he "regarded the institution of *marjaʿiyya* and its pronouncements as applicable to all Muslims, not just the Shīʿa. Sistani's perspectives went beyond the simplistic categorisation of 'quietist' and 'activist' scholars".[613] Allawi makes the

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[610] Jonathan Morrow, "Iraq's Constitutional Process II: An Opportunity Lost", *United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Special Report 155* (November 2005): 1-23.

[611] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 209.

[612] *Ibid*.

[613] *Ibid*, 210.

point that although Sistānī was careful to limit the scope of authority of the *faqih* over social matters, "his definition of social effectively covered all facets of Islamic society, including its politics".[614] This conception of clerical involvement in society partly explains Sistānī's enthusiastic advocacy for participation in the political process, and his unintentional sectarianism.

While Sistānī's rhetoric was consistently anti-sectarian, his method of information transmission contributed to what Patel describes as "unintentional sectarianism".[615] Although Sistānī was speaking for all Iraqis during his Friday sermons, the information was effectively only reaching Shīʿī audiences. Patel describes this unintentional sectarianism as a result of "the segregated mosque experience".[616] The full effects of which, did not become fully apparent until after the January 2005 elections.

In order for Iraq to move towards open democratic elections, consensus among Najaf's clerical authority was essential. However, Bremer's interim council had agreed to hold caucus-based elections in May 2004. To counter this, Sistānī issued a *fatwā* emphasising the importance of "one-person, one-vote" elections. In light of the pressure from the clerical authority and challenges of establishing a governing council, the Bush administration set 30 June 2004 as the

[614] *Ibid*, 210.

[615] David Siddhartha Patel, *Order out of Chaos: Islam, Information, and the Rise and Fall of Social Orders in Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 5.

[616] *Ibid*, 78.

deadline for transferring sovereignty to Iraq.[617] To ensure that the US caucus plans were abandoned, Sistānī first sought support from tribal leaders and then sought grassroots support.

Patriotic Ayatollahs and Shīʿī Plurality in Iraq

In January 2004, Sistānī convened a meeting with tribal leaders from across the Euphrates region to stress the importance of holding democratic elections and creating a sovereign Iraqi government. Sistānī emphasised the necessity of direct elections as a means of achieving a truly sovereign Iraqi government. He reportedly told the tribal leaders, "Authority must be yours, and the coming parliament must be composed of elected children of the people".[618] Sistānī drew parallels to the tribal alliance with the religious authority during the 1920 British occupation asserting "we want you to be revolutionaries, just as we want you to exercise sovereignty… You must play a great role, just as you played a role in the 1920 Revolt".[619] The support of the tribes was crucial, as it had been a century earlier when the clerical-tribal alliance had formed in opposition to British colonialism.

In late January 2004, after securing the support of tribal factions, tens of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets to demonstrate in support of democracy. The crowds chanted and held signs promoting the harmony between democracy and Islam. One placard read: "Yes, yes to the religious leadership, and yes, yes to elections".[620] At the protest, Sistānī's representative

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[617] Dodge, *Iraq's Future*, 24.

[618] Cole, *The Ayatollahs and Democracy in Iraq*, 16.

[619] *Ibid*.

[620] *Ibid*, 18.

Hashem al-Awad, told the crowd: "The sons of the Iraqi people demand a political system based on direct elections and a constitution that realises justice and equality for everyone".[621] To which the crowd responded: "Yes, yes to elections. No, no to occupation".[622] The street demonstrations brought together a diverse group of Shīʿī voices who were dissatisfied with Washington's plans for a caucus system in Iraq. Members of the SCIRI, the Badr Brigades and a variety of young Iraqi Shīʿītes showed unity on the issue of democratic elections. Ultimately, Sistānī's protests succeeded, and Washington scheduled elections for January 2005.

In February 2004, Sistānī gave an interview to Der Spiegel to clarify whether his advocacy for democratic elections would lead to a tyranny of the Shīʿīte majority. He replied "Not at all. Even if a certain community holds a majority in numbers, this will not lead to the creation of a political majority because in every community there are different political orientations".[623] Sistānī held a strong belief in the peaceful transfer of power and believed that leaders should emerge within Islamic society without hindrance. In the same interview, he said, "Since the majority of the Iraqi people are Muslims, they are sure to choose a system which will respect the principles of the Islamic Sharīʿa, and also protect the religious minorities".[624] When pressed on his position towards federalism, Sistānī replied: "The origins of federalism and its suitable type shall be determined by the Iraqi people through elections. Nothing shall be broadcast until that time".[625] Sistānī was confident that if the democratic process was widely supported, Iraq

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[621] "100,000 Demand Iraqi Elections", *The Guardian*, 20 January 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jan/19/iraq.

[622] *Ibid*.

[623] "Newspaper Interview with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī", *Der Spiegel*, 22 February 2004.

[624] *Ibid*.

[625] *Ibid*.

would move towards greater levels of intersect harmony, desectarianisation, and inter-faith solidarity.[626] Equally, Sistānī placed responsibility on the UN to facilitate free, fair and timely elections.

In addressing the role of the UN in the transition of power in Iraq, Sistānī declared: "Now it [the UN] is also obligated to supervise the transition from occupation regime to a sovereign Iraq in every detail".[627] He emphasised the importance of preventing any "delaying tactics of the occupier" through a UN Security Council resolution and insisted that the resolution must also contain "guarantees that there will be no further delay of elections".[628] Sistānī also made clear his support for the "rights of religious minorities".[629] He made a veiled threat of another Iraqi uprising should the elections not take place, stating: "the people know what they have to do… Appropriate posters are printed already and stored throughout the country ready for distribution".[630] Sistānī viewed the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) put forward by the US as an interim constitution as counterproductive to the establishment of democracy in Iraq.[631]

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[626] For literature on the emerging 'desectarianization' project see, Simon Mabon, "Desectarianization: Looking Beyond the Sectarianization of Middle Eastern Politics", *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 17:4 (2019): 23-35; Justin Gengler, "Sectarianism from the Top Down or Bottom Up? Explaining the Middle East's Unlikely De-sectarianization after the Arab Spring", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18:1 (2020): 109-113; Morten Valbjørn, "Countering Sectarianism: The Many Paths, Promises and Pitfalls of De-sectarianization", *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 18:1 (2020): 12-22.

[627] "Newspaper Interview with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī", *Der Spiegel*, 22 February 2004.

[628] *Ibid*.

[629] *Ibid*.

[630] *Ibid*.

[631] For the 62 article document, see "Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period", *OCHA Services*, 8 March 2004, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/law-administration-state-iraq-transitional-period.

Sistānī and The Transitional Administrative Law

The TAL was signed in March 2004, charting what Sistānī saw as a dangerous precedent for an ethno-sectarian framework of governance. He had several reservations regarding the TAL and worked collaboratively with international institutions to ensure its removal from the Iraqi political process. While he did not issue a *fatwā* against its adoption, Sistānī was vocal in opposition to the plan. Sectarianism remained a pressing issue in Iraq, and the TAL's proposed collective presidency consisting of one Kurd, one Sunnī Arab and one Shīʿīte Arab all but enshrined an ethnosectarian dimension to the constitution.[632] Such a prospect, in Sistānī's view, would set Iraq on a dangerous course that would damage the "unity of the country".[633] He warned that the sectarian model of governance would cause long-term "instability, segmentation and fragmentation" in Iraq.[634] Again appealing to the UN, he emphasised that the TAL should not "acquire international legitimacy" and asked that this point be made to the Security Council.[635] In a March letter to the UN regarding Resolution 1546 on Iraq's sovereignty and election timeframes, he argued the TAL was conceived "under the effect of occupation, did not comply with the law and was rejected by the majority of the people".[636] Sistānī's efforts to the UN prevailed and there was no mention of the TAL in Resolution 1546.

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[632] Sistānī *Bayan* dated 27 Muharram 1425/19 March 2004; It can also be argued that this would have enshrined symbolic violence in the constitution.

[633] Sistānī statement on the TAL, March 7, 2004.

[634] Sistānī letter of response to Lakhdar Brahimi, March 18, 2004.

[635] *Ibid*.

[636] Sistānī message to the International Security Council: "A Warning to Refrain from Referring to the Law of Administration for the State in Security Council Resolution 1546", March 18, 2004.

Sistānī believed that for Iraq to regain legitimacy as a state, it had to do so through the legitimate frameworks of the UN rather than those proposed by the US. In a letter addressed to the president of the UN Security Council dated June 6, 2004, Sistānī warned of the issues that would arise from the creation of an un-elected council under occupation. He wrote,

> This is against the laws and rejected by most Iraqi people. Therefore, any attempts to make this 'law 'appear legitimate by including it in the international resolution is considered as contrary to the desire of the Iraqi people and a forewarning to dangerous consequences. Kindly convey the position of the Religious Marjaiyya in this regard to their Excellences the honourable members of the Security Council.[637]

On June 28, 2004, the CPA handed over political control of the Iraqi Interim Government to Iyad Allawi. Following the instalment of Allawi, Sistānī maintained the 'one person, one vote' principle.[638] Sistānī's advocacy on this matter encouraged inter-human solidarity through desectarianisation. In August 2004, sectarian violence in Iraq was high, and Sistānī and promoted inter-human solidarity by denouncing inter-faith violence against Christian churches in Iraq.[639]

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[637] "Document 586: Letter to the President of the UN Security Council from the Office of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī – 6 June 2004".

[638] An important point to consider is that although Sistani emphasised elections over the US-proposed caucus system, another factor was Iranian activity in Najaf, which Dodge recalled from interviews during this period: "The main worry is the activity and intentions of Iranian government employees in Iraq. Key Iraqi Shia religious figures interviewed in the spring of 2004 expressed active concern about Iranian intelligence personnel operating in Najaf. They argued that the level of this activity directly affected and constrained the conduct and public statements of senior Shia figures". See Dodge, *Iraq's Future*, 46.

[639] Bayan dated 2 August 2004.

2004 saw a rise in attacks against Shīʿī shrines and ritual ceremonies across Baghdad, Karbalāʾ and Kadhimiya.[640] This sectarian violence spilled into the political sphere with Shīʿī deploying sectarian rhetoric in the lead-up to the 2005 elections. Once again, Sistānī chose a negotiated approach by offering a *bayan* of neutrality of the issue of federalism.[641] This contrasted the Ṣadrist rhetoric which advocated for federalism and promoted sectarian Shīʿīte politics. The increased plurality of Shīʿīte actors in Najaf, such as the Ṣadrists, challenged the US perception that Shīʿī political authority in the holy shrine cities was secular and executive.

In October 2004, Sistānī issued his famous 'democracy *fatwā'* which described voting as a religious duty that "all Iraqis shall participate in".[642] Sistānī encouraged women to vote, even if their husbands did not allow them, comparing their courage to that of Zaynab during the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Posters attributed to Sistānī were inscribed with statements such as "Truly, women who go forth to the polling centers on election day are like Zaynab, who went forth to Karbalāʾ".[643] In this way, Sistānī effectively linked themes of Shīʿī piety and tradition to the political process in Iraq. However, Patel argues that Sistānī also increased the "expected costs for a Shi'a for not voting" by issuing a *fatwā'* explicitly stating how to vote.[644]

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[640] Dodge, *Iraq*, 57.

[641] Bayan dated 31 August 2004.

[642] Sistānī *fatwā* October 13, 2004.

[643] Al-Rahim, "The Sistani Factor", 50.

[644] Patel, *Order out of Chaos,* 133; Sistānī's *fatwa* read: "all citizens, male or female, who are eligible to vote must make sure that their names are properly registered on the electoral register". See Statement (Arabic) From the Office of Sayyid Sistani, Najaf, dated 26 Shaʿban 1425 (Friday 1 October 2004).

Sistānī and the United Iraq Alliance

In the lead up to the 2005 elections, sectarian violence enabled enterprising Shīʿī preachers to capitalise on social divisions for political capital. The Shīʿī community in Iraq underwent a transformation of its own. Shīʿī mosques, particularly those not directly under the authority of the *marjaʿiyya*, started to embrace their newfound liberties. Friday sermons took on a more politically charged tone. Sistānī's rhetoric disavowed sectarianism, but his vast influence on Iraq's Shīʿī community invariably influenced how Iraqis chose to vote.

The relentless wave of car and suicide bombings, with its resulting devastation, provided sermon leaders with a justification to level accusations not only at the insurgents but also at those perceived as sympathisers or associates.[645] As Allawi notes,[646]

> Sistani built his roadmap for the elections in a deliberate and measured manner. There could be no viable electoral strategy for any avowedly Shi'a group without reference to Sistani and the *Marji'iyya*. All the main political parties trekked to Najaf to coordinate their actions with his office and find out the direction he was leaning towards.

Political parties rallied to the *marjaʿiyya's* calls for a united Shīʿa front, manifesting in the form of the United Iraq Alliance (UIA). Allawi notes that a "silent war was launched for the *Marji'iyya*'s ear".[647] Faced with the prospect of elections, which they had invested so much hope in, being dominated by a single, all-party list, the *marjaʿiyya* intensified their efforts to persuade the contentious Shi'a political leaders to form a list supported by the *marjaʿiyya*.

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[645] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 237.

[646] *Ibid*, 341.

[647] *Ibid*, 340.

Allawi writes that the "genesis of the UIA as an umbrella group came from inside the *Marji'iyya* itself… According to Sistani's son Muhammed Reda, the idea had been germinating in the *Marji'iyya*'s minds for several months".[648] The UIA was seen as "beholden to the Najaf religious hierarchy".[649] Although there was no official statement from Sistānī's office supporting the UIA, it was broadly understood as "Sistānī's list".[650]

Sistānī and the 2005 Referendum

Parliamentary elections were held on 30 January 2005. Sistānī endorsed the elections and encouraged participation. The UIA coalition comprising of 22 Shīʿī political parties, won 47% of the vote. As noted, Sistānī did not officially endorse the group, but many Iraqis understood it as "Sistānī's list". Dodge and Mansour argue that Sistānī, and other political entities, "contributed to the elections playing a major role in the sectarianization of Iraq".[651] They argue this by pointing out that Sistānī had demanded the CPA initiate elections as soon as possible and organised a Shīʿī coalition to "maximise the community's influence in parliament".[652] This was complicated by the fact that Sistānī's restraint in supporting political parties was not replicated by his *wakils* (agents).

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[648] *Ibid*, 343.

[649] *Ibid*, 346.

[650] Newspaper reporting at the time played a role in propagating the notion that Sistānī supported the UIA. See "Atul Aneja, "Attempts to Divide", *Frontline the Hindu*, 14 January 2005, https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/article30203054.ece; Clark Lombardi, "'Robust' Political Process Offers Hope for Iraq", *NPR*, 12 December 2005, https://www.npr.org/2005/12/12/5046700/robust-political-process-offers-hope-for-iraq.

[651] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and Desectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field", 61.

[652] *Ibid*, 62.

Although Sistānī had not directly endorsed the UIA, Patel argues that his mosque network "clearly campaigned for the [Sistānī] list and gave Iraqis the impression he had endorsed it".[653] Moreover, the outcome of the election renewed Iraq's elite consociational bargain. This new bargain saw the Daʿwa party and SCIRI take control of the UIA. Dodge describes Sistānī as an "unwitting player" in the process of symbolic violence imposed on Iraq through electoral mobilisation.[654] This was because both groups relied on his symbolic, social and cultural capital to maximise their vote and impose their ethno-sectarian vision on Iraq's political field.[655] The advocacy of Sistānī's mosque network during the election increased the appeal of the UIA to a large portion of Shīʿī voters. This ultimately contributed to the sectarianization of Iraq's political field and re-entrenched the consociational elite political bargain.[656]

Days after the elections, Al-Qaeda in Iraq escalated its bombing attacks, killing hundreds of Shīʿītes. Describing the post-2005 social fracturing, Allawi wrote, "It would be necessary to return to the Mongol invasion to discern a similar cataclysmic upheaval that spread to every corner of the country".[657] Sectarian violence continued in the lead up to the 15 October referendum on the proposed constitution. Sistānī was notably absent. The day before the referendum, Sistānī office issued the following statement: "His highness favours the

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[653] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 134.

[654] Dodge, "The Failures of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 465.

[655] Marsin Alshamary, "Religious Peacebuilding in Iraq: Prospects and Challenges from the Hawza", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15:4 (2021): 495-509, 499.

[656] Dodge, *Iraq*, 44.

[657] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 386-387.

participation of the citizens in the referendum and their voting 'yes' to the constitution, despite the failure to eliminate some of its weaknesses".[658] The referendum on the ratification of the proposed constitution passed with 71% of the population voting "yes". Although the referendum can be seen as a democratic success, it exacerbated and alienated major sections of Iraqi society.[659] In December 2005, Iraq held its second set of elections. The UIA won 128 of 275 seats, shy of the 138 needed to form an outright majority. However, the elections did not bring peace to Iraq and the UIA entrenched sectarianism in the political system.

The UIA quickly imposed its will on all state institutions. Much of this can be attributed to Sistānī's indirect support for the group. Allawi wrote,[660]

> Sistani's deputies and his entire organisation inside Iraq were mobilised to get people to vote. When asked by Sistani's followers whom to vote for, the deputies would invariably praise the UIA and 'recommend' people to vote for them.

Once in power, the Prime Minister was compelled to accept that two or three UIA representatives would be embedded in every ministry presided over by a UIA minister.[661] This all but enshrined sectarian identity in Iraq's post-election political and social structures. As sectarianism became institutionalised in state structures, it continued to spread violently in wider society.

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[658] Email from Sistānī's office in Qom. 14 October 2005.

[659] Dodge, *Iraq*, 44; Dodge writes that the passing of the referendum "represented a temporal snapshot of the relative power coherence of the groups struggling to define Iraq's post-invasion political field". The three main parties being the PUK, KDP and SCIRI. See Dodge, "The Failures of Peacebuilding in Iraq", 466.

[660] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, 390.

[661] *Ibid*, 394.

Beyond the Threshold of Sacred Authority: The Sectarian Conflict in Iraq After 2005

In the aftermath of the 2005 elections in Iraq, Sistānī adopted a less active role in the peace process. Between January 2004 and August 2006, Sistānī issued 40 *bayans*, only three of which addressed the political peace process specifically.[662] This period is characterised by Kadhum as "The Shi'a moment' – A time to consolidate Shi'a power through Shi'a political identity and mass support".[663] However, this "Shi'a moment" also created new challenges for the clerical authority as Iraq was embroiled in a complex civil conflict. Dodge argues that the elite bargain struck at the 2005 elections,

> played a major role in triggering civil violence. Although Iraq's cultural and ethnic cleavages were not the cause of the violence, they acted as a read-made excuse for those perpetrating mass killings and for those coercive and ethnic entrepreneurs seeking to mobilise sections of the population for financial and political gain.[664]

The violence in Iraq between 2006 and 2009 is commonly referred to as a period of sectarian violence or civil war.[665] In reality, it reflected a complex civil conflict where divisive sectarian language and imagery was used to justify the conflict.[666] The conflict comprised of three loose

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[662] Reidar Visser, "Sistani, the United States and Politics in Iraq: From Quietism to Machiavellianism", *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Paper* no.700 (2006): 1-32, 16-17.

[663] Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet", 8-9.

[664] Dodge, *Iraq*, 48.

[665] This was a particularly violent period in Iraq's post-invasion history. Civilian death tolls increased from 20,200 in 2005, to 34,500 in 2006 "when 3709 were murdered in a single month". See Toby Dodge, "From Regime Change to Civil War: Violence in Post-invasion Iraq", in *The Peace in Between: Post-War Violence and Peacebuilding*, eds. Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal (London: Routledge, 2012), 132-150, 133; For a chronology of terrorist attacks in Iraq between 2003-2007, see "Chronology- The Deadliest Bomb Attacks in Iraq", *Reuters*, 23 January 2007, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iraq-bombings-idUKL2277490320070122.

[666] Dodge, *Iraq*, 53.

categories of belligerents. The first comprised of Sunnī factions divided between Baaʿath Party loyalists, an array of Sunnī militia and tribal groups, and the Mujahideen Shura Council containing al-Qaeda in Iraq.[667] The second factions was made up of international forces supporting the Iraqi security forces led by the US and their allies such as the United Kingdom and Australia, and also Kurdish Peshmerga forces.[668] The third faction, which was seen as problematic from the US perspective, was a formidable force against al-Qaeda and ISIS but was largely loyal and sympathetic to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This Shīʿīte faction of the Iraqi civil conflict comprised of Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous), Kataib Hezbollah (Brigades of God) and the Badr Brigades.[669] It is important to note that the primary cause of this communalist conflict was "the collapse of the state and subsequent security vacuum".[670] During this period of increased violence, the religious authority's advocacy for calm and restraint largely fell on deaf ears.

In February 2006, the Al-ʿAskarī mosque in Sāmarrāʾ, which houses the shrines of the 10th and 11th Shīʿī Imāms, ʿAlī al-Hādī and his son Hasan al-ʿAskarī, was attacked by al-Qaeda in

[667] For a useful primer on the Mujahideen Shura Council umbrella group, see Mahan Abedin, "Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq: Fact or Fiction?", *The Jamestown Foundation* 3:12 (March 2006): 1-7.

[668] For an elaborate study of US military collaboration with the Kuridsh Peshmerga, see Lawsen Hawezy, "U.S. Military Cooperation with Kurdistan's Peshmerga", (MPhil diss., Tuft's Fletcher School, 2015).

[669] For a recent appraisal of the PMU and its network structure, see Renad Mansour, "Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the State in Iraq", *Chatham House* (February 2021): 1-45; For an examination of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, see Sam Wyer, "The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq", *Institute for the Study of War*, Middle East Security Report 7 (2012): 1-34; For Kata'ib Hezbollah, see Rafid Jaboori, "The Leadership and Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah", *The Jamestown Foundation* 18:7 (2020): 7-9.

[670] Dodge, *Iraq*, 35.

Iraq.[671] The attack ignited sectarian violence across the country.[672] In response, Sistānī called for calm and a seven-day mourning period. Patel describes the Al-ʿAskarī attack as either "a turning point that triggered Iraq's sectarian civil war or an event that significantly accelerated a civil war that was already underway".[673] Violence escalated across the rest of Iraq following the attacks.

In April 2006, terrorists detonated a car bomb in Najaf killed 10 people and wounded 30 others, prompting two followers of Sistānī, Ayatollah Mohamed Saeed Hakeem and Ayatollah Bashir al-Najafi, to release *fatwās* calling for the formation of a national government and condemning the US and anti-government militias for violence against Shīʿa populations.[674] Al-Najafi said, "The occupation brought all these troubles and was the cause, patron and attorney to the former regime".[675] Al-Hakim on the other hand, issued a *fatwā* on April 8 condemning "fundamentalists and Baʿathists for targeting followers of the holy Imāms".[676] However, these *fatwās* were seen as inflammatory and potentially emboldening Shīʿī militias according to US diplomatic cables.[677]

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[671] The shrine is also known as *l-'Askariyyayn* or "the two ʿAskarīs". See "History of the Shrine of Imām Ali Al-Naqi & Imām Hasan Al-Askari, Peace Be Upon Them", *Al-Islam.org*, n.d., https://www.al-islam.org/history-shrines/history-shrine-Imām-ali-al-naqi-Imām-hasan-al-askari-peace-be-upon-them.

[672] Robert F. Worth, "Blast Destroys Shrine in Iraq, Setting Off Sectarian Fury", *The New York Times*, 22 February 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/22/international/middleeast/blast-destroys-shrine-in-iraq-setting-off-sectarian.html.

[673] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 141.

[674] "Car Bomb at Shiʿite Shrine in Al-Najaf Kills 10", *Radio Free Europe*, 6 April 2006, https://www.rferl.org/a/1067440.html.

[675] "Ayatollahs Blame U.S. For Sectarian Violence", *Wikileaks*, Cable:*06HILLAH59_a,*,6 April 2006, https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06HILLAH28_a.htmlAccessed 20 June 2021.

[676] *Ibid*.

[677] *Ibid*

In April 2006, a US diplomatic cable titled: "Ayatollahs Blame U.S. For Sectarian Violence", provided insight into how the American government viewed the *fatwā* interventions of the *ʿulamā'* following terrorist attacks near the Imām ʿAlī shrine and Baghdad's Buratha mosque.[678] The cable highlighted the reactions of Bashir al-Najafi and Muḥammad Saeed al-Hakim, with Alfred F. Fonteneau, the Deputy Chief of Mission to the US mission in Oman, noting that: "The ḥawza and the people have grown tired…Patience has begun to run out, and I can only guess what tomorrow will bring".[679] The same cable concluded:

> The fatwās of these two Ayatollahs are a strong rebuke of violence targeting Shia. While the Marjaʿaya have always spoken out against violence, the language is strong. The condemnation of the effort to form a government is increasingly a central theme of the Marjaʿaya's public statements. While Ayatollah Al Sistānī himself has yet to issue a Fatwā, it would likely mirror these two statements. Of note in Al Najafi and Al Hakeem's statements is the absence of an explicit call for peace. Should Sistānī issue a statement as stern, it is possible that without a call for peace, it would embolden Shia militias.[680]

It was in this context that Sistānī issued his own statement on 21 July. Iraq was descending into sectarian violence defined by terrorist attacks with large causalities and reactionary indiscriminate death squads.[681] In the statement, he declared,

> There are no words to describe the gruesomeness and horror of these events and the extent to which they violate all human, religious, and national values. I call on all sincere persons who are zealous for the unity of this country and the future of its children, including intellectuals, religious and political leaders, tribal chiefs, and others to put forth the utmost effort in order to stop this serial bloodshed which, if it continues as the enemies desire, will inflict the most grievous harm on the

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[678] *Ibid*.

[679] *Ibid*.

[680] *Ibid*.

[681] Dodge notes that the Ministry of Interior's Federal Police force, driven by sectarian and pollical bias "acted as a death squad" between 2006-2007. See Dodge, *Iraq*, 125.

> unity of this people, and will stand as a long-term obstacle to the realization of its hope for liberation, stability and progress.[682]

As sectarian violence in Iraq continued to escalate and the Ṣadrist movement largely ignored Sistānī's calls for peace, he began to adopt a more pessimistic view of his role in Iraqi society. This ultimately led him to announce to his followers, "I will not be a political leader anymore… I shall now only entertain received questions about religious matters".[683] According to Sistānī's previous statements, a jurist should not attempt to influence Islamic society if they are not accepted by the believers. With the rise in retaliatory killings by Shīʿa militias, led by Ṣadr, Sistānī believed that his popularity and authority had diminished to the point where he could no longer effectively to intervene in society. It is also possible that Sistānī's realised that any intervention he made in the political field would be used to by Shīʿī actors to legitimise their imposition of symbolic violence.

While it can be argued Sistānī's influence was waning, he had already exercised considerable influence in developing Iraq's political system. Cole makes the important point that since the US invasion, Iraq had held elections, with those elected having drafted a constitution which was approved by referendum.[684] He writes that, "In the aftermath of all these achievements, there were very few issues left on which Sistānī felt he had a duty to intervene".[685] Indeed, Iraq

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[682] al-Sharq al-Awsat July 21, 2006.

[683] Gethin Chamberlain and Aqeel Hussein, "I no longer have power to save Iraq from civil war, warns Shia leader", *The Telegraph*, 3 September 2006, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1527928/I-no-longer-have-power-to-save-Iraq-from-civil-war-warns-Shia-leader.html.

[684] Juan Cole, "The Decline of Grand Ayatollah Sistānī's Influence in 2006-2007", *Die Friedens-Warte* 82:2 (2007): 67-83.

[685] *Ibid*, 80.

had built up the structures for governance, with a variety of Shīʿī parties in unprecedented positions of power. However, the subsequent conduct of those parties in power invariably contravened Sistānī's pre-election intentions.

Dodge notes that from 2006 onwards, Nouri al-Maliki's party shifted Iraq's political field from an "imposed democracy to a form of competitive authoritarianism".[686] He consolidated his power by fostering divisions within the ruling elite and "exploiting the lack of rules governing politicians' behaviours and building informal networks across government".[687] Al-Maliki imposed this authoritarianism through his informal *Malikiyoun* system, comprised firstly by his inner circle network of family and close advisors, and reinforced more broadly by the Daʿwa party infrastructure. He sustained this form of competitive authoritarianism by controlling various wings of the government including the army, police force and intelligence services.[688]

Despite the proliferation of the *Malikiyoun* system Sistānī initially took a hands-off approach and did not comment publicly on governance issues. Privately however, Sistānī had concerns about al-Maliki's growing authoritarianism and sectarian agenda. The relationship began deteriorating as Maliki consolidated power and excluded Sunni segments from government positions. In 2008, Sistānī intervened to support the Iraqi military offensive against Shīʿī

[686] Toby Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years After Regime Change: The Rise of a New Authoritarianism", *International Affairs* 89:2 (2013): 241-257.

[687] Dodge, *Iraq*, 161.

[688] *Ibid*, 162.

militias in Basra – known as the Battle of Basra.[689] His intervention was seen as a subtle critique of Maliki's divisive politics. In 2010, Sistānī advocated for a secular, power-sharing government after elections failed to produce a clear winner. This was viewed as a rebuke of Maliki's consolidation of power. Al-Maliki ignored Sistānī's advice and eventually won a second term in 2010 after forming a Shīʿī-centric governing coalition – widening the rift between the two leaders.[690]

Iraq continued to descend into a new form of authoritarian tyranny, characterised by endemic corruption, sectarianism, and weakened civil institutions.[691] Al-Maliki consolidated his authoritarian grip on Iraq, privileging his own interests and those of the ruling elites above the national interest. Sistānī remained relatively quiet while Iraqi's state structures were plaguing development and threats from extremist groups such as ISIS threatened broader society.[692] It was this threat that directly threatened *ḥawza* institution, forcing it to exercise clerical authority.

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[689] Nazar Janabi, "Who Won the Battle for Basra?", *Washington Institute*, 10 April 2008, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/who-won-battle-basra; Gaith Abdul-Ahad, "We're Fighting for Survival, says Mahdi Army Commander", *The Guardian*, 28 March 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/28/iraq1; Richard Norton-Taylor and Julian Borger, "The Battle for Basra: Iraqis fight Mahdi Army as British Troops Remain at Base", *The Guardian*, 25 March 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/26/iraq.military

[690] David Kenner, "Iraq at Eye Level", *Foreign Policy*, 8 March 2010, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/03/08/iraq-at-eye-level-2/

[691] Dodge notes that in 2011, the UN estimated that 83% of the country's water waste was untreated and 25% of the population lacked access to safe drinking water. See Dodge, "State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after Regime Change", 253.

[692] Loveday Morris, "A Letter from Sistani Turned the Tide Against Iraq's Leader", *Washington Post*, 13 August 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/a-letter-from-sistani-turned-the-tide-against-iraqs-leader/2014/08/13/3b3426cf-60ee-4856-ad26-d01a9c6cc9c3_story.html.

Sistānī's 2014 Jihād *Fatwā* and the Shrine Militias

Although Sistānī had succeeded in bringing Iraq to the election polls, the electoral landscape was highly ethno-sectarianised with parties organising and campaigning along sectarian lines.[693] More worryingly, this sectarianism was not limited to Iraq's nascent political sphere. Following the emergence of ISIS in 2014 and its swift advances through Mosul, Iraq's state structures collapsed, and its holy sites were threatened. ISIS spokesperson Abu Muhamad al-Adani released a message pledging to turn Iraq into a "living hell for the Shi'a and other heretics".[694] He directly targeted the shrine cities noting this would take place "not in Sāmarrāʾ or Baghdad but in Karbalāʾ al-munajjasah [the defiled] and Najaf al-ashrak [the most polytheistic]".[695] This threat to Shīʿī holy sites prompted Sistānī to issue one of his most consequential *fatwās* of the 21st century.

On 4 June 2014, ISIS launched its assault on the city of Mosul. By June 10, the group had gained control of the city, and on June 12, Iran announced that it would deploy the IRGC to Iraq to combat ISIS and protect the holy shrines. The following day during Friday prayer, Ayatollah Sistānī issued a significant *fatwā* known as *Wajib al-Kifai* (collective obligation).[696] The *fatwā* called on all citizens to "defend the country, its people, the honor of its citizens, and its sacred places", stating that it was "the legal and national responsibility of whoever can hold

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[693] Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and Desectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field", 62.

[694] Tahllha Abdulrazaq and Gareth Stansfield, "The Enemy Within: ISIS and the Conquest of Mosul", *The Middle East Journal* 70:4 (2016): 525-542.

[695] Benjamin Isakhan, *The Legacy of Iraq: From the 2003 War to the 'Islamic State'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 223.

[696] The fatwā was announced by Sistānī's representative Abdul Mehdi el-Karbalāʾi. See "السيد السيستاني يفتي بالجهاد الكفائي" (Al-Sistānī issues fatwā for sufficient jihād), *YouTube*, 14 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7by5almGhA.

a weapon to hold it to defend the country, the citizens and the holy sites".[697] The *fatwā*'s nationalistic and anti-sectarian wording was significant because it asked all Iraqis to defend national holy sites, rather than specifically urging Shīʿītes to defend Shīʿī holy sites. Despite the nationalistic wording of the *fatwā*, it served in validating and empowering existing militias in Iraq's political field.[698]

The *fatwā* had an instant impact, as millions of Iraqis responded to it. Prior to this, the commitment of the Iraqi armed forces had been called into question. However, the *fatwā* served as a catalyst for the mobilisation of a variety of forces under the banner of the PMU. The fact that Nuri al-Maliki had already set up the institutional structures of the *Hasd al-Sha'bi* meant that he was well placed to exploit Sistānī's *fatwā*. The PMU played a crucial role in Iraq's security infrastructure in the fight against ISIS. Comprised mainly of Shīʿī Iraqi, with support from Iran and its regional affiliates, the PMU operated as a broad umbrella group.[699] It is important to note, however, that Sistānī's *fatwā* did not explicitly call for Iranian intervention, which further complicated the political situation in Iraq.

Sistānī's jihād *fatwā* was a response to the violence and chaos caused by ISIS. However, various interpretations suggest a subtle duality. On the one hand, the *fatwā* addressed the immediate threat that ISIS posed to sacred shrines in Iraq. On the other hand, it can be seen as

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[697] Sheik Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalāʾei quoted in Isakhan, *The Legacy of Iraq*, 250; Tamer El-Ghobashy, Farnaz Fassihi and Ali A. Nabhan, "Thousands Heed Call to Arms in Iraq", *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 June 2014, https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqs-shiite-leaders-issue-call-to-arms-1402665085.

[698] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 147.

[699] For details on the PMU during this period, see Travis Birch "Popular: The Monopoly of Force and Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units", *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies* 35:1 (2018): 1-18.

an implicit criticism of the increasing influence of Iranian forces in Iraq. While Sistānī's primary aim was to eradicate the violence and chaos brought by ISIS, the *fatwā* can also be understood as a subtle rebuke of Iranian interference in Iraq's internal affairs. Despite these intentions, the *fatwā* inadvertently legitimised Iranian militias sending volunteers to fight in the Syrian civil conflict.[700] Just as had happened during the 2005 elections, Sistānī's religious capital was used by elites to legitimise impositions of symbolic violence in the political field.

The timing of the *fatwā* also confirms Patel's observation that Sistānī's advocacy was pre-emptively authorising "a practice that was already about to occur".[701] More importantly, Sistānī's *fatwā* endowed the practice with religious capital. Kantz Feder argues that Sistānī's *fatwā* "was as much about the threat posed by the Islamic State as it was about the divisions within the Shiite community".[702] At a time when sectarian politicians such as Nour al-Maliki had consolidated power and Iranian-backed militias had a dominant presence in Iraq's security environment, it was crucial that the religious authority respond. According to Kantz Feder: "Sistānī could not afford to stand by idly as the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and Iranian-backed militias allied with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki took the lead in defending Iraq and Shiʿi holy sites".[703] As previously discussed in this thesis, the clerical authority's primary priorities have been supporting Iraqi independence and defending of holy sites. Like those before him, Sistānī's institutional responsibility was primarily the protection

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[700] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 148.

[701] *Ibid*, 69.

[702] Rachel Kantz Feder, "A Call to Arms: What Lies Beneath Sistani's Potent Fatwa?", *Open Democracy*, 10 July 2014, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/call-to-arms-what-lies-beneath-sistanis-potent-fatwa/.

[703] *Ibid*.

of the *ḥawza*. For Sistānī to remain silent during this time would have set a dangerous precedent that could not be easily reversed. As Feder notes:

> Leaving the protection of Najaf and Karbalāʾ exclusively to Shiʿi militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps would have legitimized further Iranian interference in Iraq. This would have undermined Sistānī's assiduous efforts to thwart Iran's penetration of Iraq particularly in the religious sphere and it would have enduring consequences that could enfeeble the religious establishment.[704]

However, Iran recognised that the *fatwā* mechanism was an ideal instrument to mobilise the Shīʿa in Iraq to defeat ISIS and crystallise its Axis of Resistance.[705] At the direction of Iran's Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, the IRGC provided a trove of weapons and munitions to the newly created Shīʿī militias which were vital in their defence against ISIS. Sayej made a similar conclusion regarding the two dimensions to Sistānī's *fatwā* as:

> an appeal to Iraqi nationalism without any sectarian sentiment, shying away from language that would conflate ISIS with Sunnis. Yet we can also view this fatwā through the lens of the rivalry with Qom and with Tehran.[706]

Two points are worth making here. First, it is important not to exaggerate the role of Najaf's 'rivalry' with Qom in understanding the *fatwā*. The rivalry was not balanced, with Qom not possessing the same level of autonomous agency as a shrine city as Najaf does. As the symbolic centre of Shīʿī theology, Qom primarily serves the objectives of the state. This rivalry can be

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[704] *Ibid*.

[705] For a nuanced analysis of Iran's approach to ISIS, see Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran and Daesh: The Case of a Reluctant Shia Power", *Middle East Policy* 22:3 (2015): 44-54.

[706] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs,* 112.

more accurately understood as one between Najaf and Iran within Shīʿīsm.[707] The second point worth considering is that while Sistānī's *fatwā* did not express any sectarian bias, it still played a role in reinforcing the ethno-sectarian framework upon which Iraq's consociational bargain was built. Beyond deterring the ultimately unlikely threat ISIS posed to holy sites, it's hard to argue that the *fatwā*' did anything more than reaffirm the existing consociational power structure within Iraq's political field.

The Temporality of Sistānī's Jihād *Fatwā*

The *fatwā* forced the international community to recognise Sistānī and Najaf's *ḥawza* as a crucial source of legitimacy in Iraq. One month after Sistānī issued the jihād *fatwā*, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon met with Sistānī in Najaf to "seek wisdom on developments in Iraq".[708] The two leaders met to discuss various issues of inter-human solidarity in the Iraq conflict such as human rights violations against civilians and targeting of places of worship. In a statement, Secretary Moon said, "Here in Najaf, I once again as Secretary-General of the United Nations, strongly condemn these violations of fundamental universal human rights".[709] This level of clerical influence in early 21st century world politics contrasts the century earlier when al-Shirāzī's telegrams to President Wilson went unanswered. One could argue that the

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[707] Although outside the scope of this thesis, Qom and Najaf demonstrate considerable cooperation in maintaining a duopoly over global Uṣūlī teaching, eliminating competition elsewhere. Qom teaches primarily in Persian, and Najaf primarily teaches in Arabic. See Devin J. Stewart, "The Portrayal of an Academic Rivalry: Najaf and Qum in the Writings and Speeches of Khomeini, 1964-78", in *The Most Learned of the Shiʿa: The Institutional of the Marjaʿ Taqlid*, ed. Walbridge, 216-229.

[708] Michael Georgy, "U.N.'s Ban Seeks Advice on Iraq Crisis From Top Cleric", *Reuters*, 24 July 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-Sistānī/u-n-s-ban-seeks-advice-on-iraq-crisis-from-top-cleric-idUSKBN0FT1MQ20140724?edition-redirect=uk/

[709] Ban Ki-Moon, "Remarks to Press in Najaf, Iraq", *United Nations Secretary-General*, 24 July 2014, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2014-07-24/remarks-press-najaf-iraq.

influence of the clerical authority in Iraq contributed to the sectarianised landscape and consociational status-quo. However, this same influence also pivoted the axes of international order, with Sistānī exerting considerable influence on both the UN and the US during the occupation.

For the most senior global governance official to visit Najaf was undoubtedly a legitimising move to Western policy makers. However, for the Shīʿī, Najaf had been the centre of Shīʿīsm for 1,400 years. Both leaders of non-state organisations of the highest relevance, the meeting between Sistānī and Moon represented a convergence between transnational clerical authority and global governance, fostering an institutional ecology which overlaps transnational and inter-polity domains. Moreover, the *fatwā* advocated inter-human solidarity in defence of sacred spaces. It also advanced national identity and sovereign interests at the inter-polity level by advocating defence of the nation. One month after Ki-Moon's visit, Sistānī joined calls for Nouri al-Maliki to stand aside.[710] Sistānī's call retired the person in charge, but not the system he unintentionally contributed to creating.

Another way of viewing the consequences of the clerical power pivot is thorough its inadvertent legitimation of militias in Iraq's political field and drawing an analytical distinction between Sistānī's role in 2003-2004 and his role in 2014. Sistānī's collective obligation *fatwā* all but negated his earlier assertions against the formation of militias following the US invasion. Although he advocated for volunteers to only join the national army and only to provide the

[710] Ali Mamouri, "How did Sistani Suceed in Ousting Maliki?", *Al-Monitor*, 20 August 2014, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/08/iraq-sistani-democratic-ways-successors-maliki.html

numbers required to defend the nation, these details were overshadowed by the general message that all abled-bodied citizens must defend the shrines. This confirms Patel's argument that Sistānī's mosque sermons successfully communicated "common knowledge" but were "less effective at generating new common knowledge that is complex".[711] The unforeseen consequence of clerical advocacy during this period led to an increased sectarian identity in Iraqi politics and a "tyranny of a Shīʿī majority", a scenario Sistānī had assured Der Spiegel in 2004 would not occur.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy in Iraq following the 2003 US-led invasion. It showed how Najaf's *ḥawza* wielded significant influence over Iraqi society, pushing the country towards parliamentary elections while unintentionally reinforcing the ethno-sectarian imposed consociational elite bargain. The chapter began through experiential cleaving, by contextualising the political situation in Iraq following the collapse of Baʿathist state structures, and its consequences for Iraq's nation-building efforts. Through creative filtration, it then traced the clerical authority's early discourses on democracy which promoted popular sovereignty as compatible with Islamic values and emphasised the centrality of the UN in Iraq's political reconstruction. The second section outlined how Sistānī's rhetoric shifted following the 2005 elections and formalisation of the Iraqi constitution to a more hands-off approach. With growing sectarianisation in Iraq's political system and sectarian violence across the nation, Sistānī did not feel he had the authority to persuade actors away from these behaviours. The final section discussed the impact of Sistānī's 2014 jihād *fatwā* to protect

[711] Patel, *Order out of Chaos*, 150.

Iraq's holy sites. It described the duality of the *fatwā* as an implicit rebuke of Iranian interference, and its impact in normalising militias in Iraq's political landscape. Significantly, the *ḥawza*'s influence oscillated across these temporal contexts as various challenges arose, and its advocacy sometimes had unintended consequences.

The clerical authority's peaceful, and non-sectarian rhetoric had unintended consequences that pivoted world politics in various ways. While local audiences followed the authority on certain issues such as the importance of participating in elections, they ignored the same authority on other issues, most notably sectarian violence and civil disobedience. One could argue that towards the end of the occupation, the clerical authority had a more significant influence on international audiences rather than local publics. A positive appraisal of this temporal context suggests that clerical advocacy contributed to Iraq's first democratic political system, provided a guiding socio-religious order during a period of chaos and destruction, and protected Iraq's holy sites when the national army could not. A less rosy analysis suggests that clerical advocacy created a communicative barrier between Shīʿī audiences and Sunnī communities, institutionalised an intensified form of sectarian politics, normalised and legitimised the existence of militia groups operating in Iraq outside of the control of the state, and inadvertently furthered Iran's geostrategic objectives in Iraq and beyond. While both interpretations can be valid simultaneously, the clerical authority's advocacy in the 21st century unintentionally enhanced the salience of sectarian identities in Iraq, in a way that contrasts its advocacy a century earlier. Having established how Najaf's clerical authority pivots world politics, the following chapters outline how Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot through its reproduction of collective identity.

Chapter Five: Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage and its Reproduction of Collective Shīʿī Identity

> "Karbalāʾ is the noblest region of the earth, and the most honourable place on earth, where your grandson [Imām al-Ḥusayn] and his people would be martyred".
>
> – Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Qūluwayh al-Qummī [d. 367 AH/976], 1997, 276)
>
> "Human beings have typically produced nested hierarchy of spatial scales within which to organize their activities and understand their world… We immediately intuit in today's world that matters look different when analyzed at global, continental, national, regional, local, or household/personal scales".[712]
>
> – David Harvey

This chapter starts from the position that Karbalāʾ is constructed as a generative pivot in world politics tangibly and intangibly, through sacred spaces and the poetic ritualisation of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The sacred Shīʿī shrine city of Karbalāʾ is located approximately 100 km southeast of Baghdad, 20 km west of the Euphrates River. The shrine city's population has grown from 20,000 residents in 1843 to over 600,000 in 2020.[713] Litvak estimated Karbalāʾs population to be approximately 85,000 in 1911, of which 65,000 were Iranians, and 25,000 identified as Arabs.[714] The 20th century Persian clerical migration to Karbalāʾ contributed to the city's urban religious fabric and the reproduction of collective transnational Shīʿī identity. Having several pilgrimage places and spaces with a rich social history, imbued with meaning where myth and reason coalesce, the city's assemblage of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces, its sites of collective pasts, and places of ritualised – and poetically ritualised – sacred landscape, combine cultural heritage

[712] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 75.

[713] Litvak, "Continuity and Change in the ʿUlamāʾ Population of Najaf and Karbalāʾ", 40.

[714] *Ibid*, 41.

and natural experience. Collectively, these sites and their significance in Shīʿī Islam construct Karbalāʾ as a spatial pivot in world politics.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines Karbalāʾs geo-cultural significance in Shīʿīsm as a focal point of transnational pilgrimage through the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The section underlines the significance of Karbalāʾ by discussing the importance of infallibility in Shīʿīsm. The second section outlines Karbalāʾs major and minor pilgrimage places and spaces. The third section demonstrates how the city and its environs represents a broader locus of pilgrimage and collective Shīʿī identity. The final section depicts several spaces of prescribed ritual and cultural heritage in and around Karbalāʾ, geographically relevant to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. This chapter concludes by highlighting how Karbalāʾs cultural landscape locus informs the space's ideological representation as a sacred representation and reminder of Shīʿī history, identity, heritage, memory and pilgrimage.

Karbalāʾs rich Shīʿī cultural landscape locus informs the space's ideological representation. As a space historically informed by memory, myth, pilgrimage, ritual and culture, Karbalāʾ is culturally constructed by the collective consciousness Shīʿī, spiritually imbued through individual experience. While Karbalāʾ may be constructed as a city, it is viewed in Shīʿī cultural heritage as a sacred spatial representation and reminder of identity, cultural heritage and pilgrimage. The ideological fabric of Karbalāʾs cultural landscape reproduces values and religious traditions and inspires individual human spirituality and experience. Collective Shīʿī identity is reproduced through performative rituals, narrative historiographies and sacred spaces. Poetically prescribed through ritual, sacred spaces are historical spaces and spots relevant to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. These include Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampments, historical

meeting places relevant to ʿĀshūrāʾ, *maqams* (situational places) and second-rate epiphenomenal shrines and mosques such as the Zaynab Hillock and the al-Hurr district and shrine. The intertextuality of ʿĀshūrāʾ enhances its perceptual value as both tangible and intangible representations and reminders of Imām al-Ḥusayn and the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Karbalāʾ and the Events of ʿĀshūrāʾ

Karbalāʾ became spatially prominent in the Muslim world almost immediately after the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn (61AH/680AD) during the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Shīʿī Islam memorialises Imām al-Ḥusayn and his followers each year during the holy month of Muharram, which culminates on ʿĀshūrāʾ, signifying the death of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans on Yazīd I's orders. Despite harsh and strict prohibition by the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil, Karbalāʾ began to attract pilgrims in approximately 850 AD.[715] The earliest accounts of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ can be found in Ibn Sa'd's (d.230AH/845AD) *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā* (The book of major classes). Ṭabāṭabā'ī carried out a complete translation of this text with an accompanying analysis in Persian.[716] The 10th-century Muslim geographer Ibn Ḥawqal documented his visit to Karbalāʾ in 366AH/977AD in his famous work *Kitāb Sūrat al-ard* (The face of the earth).[717] At the tomb of Imām Ḥusayn, Ibn Ḥawqal observed a large *mashhad* (martyrdom site) with doors on either side.[718] Karbalāʾ is an important site of cultural heritage and identity in Shīʿī Islam for several reasons. It contains the shrines of Imām

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[715] Jonathan Bloom, "Art and Architecture", in *The Shiʿi World: Pathways in Tradition and Modernity*, eds. Farhad Daftary, Amyn Sajoo and Shainool Jiwa (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015), 228-257, 230.

[716] 'Abd al-Azīz Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tarjumat al-Imām al-Ḥusayn wa maqtaluju min al-qism al-ghayr matbū' min kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kubrā li Ibn Sa'd* (Qom: Muh'assissant Āl al-Bayt li ihyā al-Turāth, 1989).

[717] Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ (Opus Geographicum)*, trans. Johannes H. Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[718] *Ibid*, 166.

al-Ḥusayn and al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī, two of the sons of the first Infallible Imām ʿAlī, the first Imām in Shīʿī Islam.

The city represents a spatio-temporal reminder of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Karbalāʾs genealogy often traces to the Battle of Karbalāʾ (61 AH/680) and the development of a resistance identity through and in the name of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The Prophet Muḥammad and other Infallible Imāms first asserted the eternal sanctity of Karbalāʾ. The earliest references to it sanctity can be found in Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Quluwayh al-Qummī's *Kāmil al-Zīyārāt*.[719] In Al-Qummī's *Kāmil al-zīyārāt* (Visiting holy shrines and places), edited and first published by Allama ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Amini, there is a ḥadīth on the authority of the fifth Infallible Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir asserting that God created Karbalāʾ 24,000 years ahead of the Kaabah, hence its eternal and primordial sanctity.[720] Phillip K. Hitti also contests claims that this divide began with the ʿĀshūrāʾ event.[721] Instead, he traces the divide to the day when certain Meccans could not find Imām ʿAlī to be so close to the Prophet Muḥammad, notably when the former was announced and introduced as the immediate successor to the Prophet Muḥammad on the Day of Ghadir Khumm.[722] It is worth noting Allama Amini devoted his life to the 9 volume, 40-year (12 composition of *al-Ghadir fi-kitāb wa al sunnah wa al-adab* ([Event of] Ghadir in the book and tradition and literature).[723] According Fakhr-Rohani, Amini consulted over 100,000 sources,

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[719] Al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-zīyārāt*.

[720] Ibn Qūluwayh Al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-zīyārāt (The Best/Noblest Zīyārat-Texts)*, ed. Allama Amini (Tehran: Saduq, 1997), 288.

[721] Philip K. Hitti, *The Near East in History: A 5000 Year Story* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1961).

[722] *Ibid*, 221.

[723] Muḥammad-Raza Fakhr-Rohani, *Devoted to the Truth: Allāma Amīnī The Author of Al-Ghadīr* (Birmingham: Sun Behind the Cloud Publications, 2019); For a brief overview of this work, see Aidan

and engaged critically with around 20,000 Sunnī sources of criticism to legitimise the event of al-Ghadir in Islamic history.[724]

An exhaustive examination of Karbalāʾs history falls outside the scope of this chapter. Because several accounts already exist, this chapter does not deal with Karbalāʾ in a strictly chronological or historical fashion. As noted, earliest accounts of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ can be found in Ibn Saʿd's (d.230AH/845AD) *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā*. A thorough Persian translation and examination was carried out in 1989.[725] Moreover, Muḥammad Bāqir Al-Majilisī's (d.1111AH/1698AD) depictions of Imām al-Ḥusayn and the Battle of Karbalāʾ in *Bihār al-Anwār* (Seas of light), crystallised the association of Karbalāʾ and Twelver Shīʿīsm in early Islamic history.[726] There exists a vast amount of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature on the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn, known as *maqātil* literature.[727] Several studies on ʿĀshūrāʾ have also been conducted. However, these are predominantly written in Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Noteworthy examples include Al-Khwārazmī, Al-Athīr, and ʻAsākir.[728] Hyder also offers a useful transnational treatment of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative and associated rituals.[729]

Parkes, "DEVOTED TO THE TRUTH: ALLĀMA AMĪNĪ THE AUTHOR OF AL-GHADĪR. By Muhammad-Raza Fakhr-Rohani. Birmingham: Sun Behind the Cloud Publications, 2019. Pp. 150. Paper, £6.99,", *Religious Studies Review* 47:2 (2021), 240-241 <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.15272>

[724] *Ibid*, 95.

[725] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tarjumat al-Imām al-Ḥusayn wa maqtaluju min al-qism al-ghayr matbū' min kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kubrā li Ibn Sa'd*.

[726] Bāqir Muḥammad Al-Majilisī, *Bihār al-Anwār* (Tehran: Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-Islāmiya, 1969).

[727] Sebastian Günther, "Maqtātil Literature in Medieval Islam", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24 (1994): 192-212.

[728] Al-Muwaffaq b. Ahmad Al-Khwārazmī, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, eds. Shaykh Muḥammad al-Samāwī (Najaf: Matba'at al-Zahrā', 1969); 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn Al-Athīr, *Al Kāmil fi al-tārīkh*, eds. Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Daqqāq (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt li al-Tibāʿa wa al-Nashr, 1965); Abū-l Qāsim ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, eds. Muhibb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-ʿAmrāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995).

[729] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*.

Chronologically Imām al-Ḥusayn's discourses during his journey from Medina to Karbalāʾ, Fakhr-Rohani provides a thorough examination of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ by translating, annotating, and situating these written and oral discourses in Shīʿī history.[730]

The Anatomy of Karbalāʾ as a Pilgrimage City

Karbalāʾ is a focal point of transnational Shīʿī pilgrimage and collective identity. The city is a manifestation of both pre- and post-ʿĀshūrāʾ emphases on the eternal sanctity of its land. This is because arch-martyrs such as Imām al-Ḥusayn and his companions are buried in Karbalāʾ. In addition to its geographic representation of ʿĀshūrāʾ several Infallible Imāms are buried in Karbalāʾ. The concept of Infallibility is significant in Shīʿī Islam. It is not a status attained through personal piety. Rather, it is a divinely granted privilege. While all humans are fallible, in Shīʿī Islam, closeness to the Infallibles such as Imām al-Ḥusayn brings one closer to God. Karbalāʾ is unique in containing both first- and second-rate shrine-mosques and several tomb-free sacred spaces. Geographically, Karbalāʾ gains divine status by housing the fifth infallible shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Within Imām al-Ḥusayn's shrine, the holiest place is the precise location where he is buried. While still contributing to the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity, all other places are epiphenomenal in status and secondary nature. Although Al-ʿAbbās was not an Infallible personality, in Shīʿī memory and scholarship, he is uniquely regarded as above all other people. This is because he was raised in the house of Imām ʿAlī, and his two elder brothers were Imām Ḥasan and Imām al-Ḥusayn.[731] It is for this reason that

[730] Fakhr-Rohani, *From Medina to Karbala*.

[731] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021, (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

no one is comparable with Al-ʿAbbās in Shīʿī Islam.[732] While central to ʿĀshūrāʾ and collective Shīʿī identity, he does not match his elder brother Imām al-Ḥusayn because he was the Infallible Imām. As Al-Qazwini argues, "The power of infallibility or without sin does not make a person incapable of committing sins, rather he/she refrains from sins and mistakes by his/her own power and will".[733] Karbalāʾ is unique because it is a shrine city containing collective martyrs and multiple venerable dignitaries, both Infallible and non-Infallible. Karbalāʾ is distinct because Infallible shrines rank higher than shrines of non-Infallibles. More broadly, its urban fabric and broader cultural landscape serve as an intrinsic reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Karbalāʾ is exceptional in that the exact spaces and sites of ʿĀshūrāʾ events and peoples are contained within and around the holy sanctuary of Imām al-Ḥusayn. There exist over ten significant places in Karbalāʾ related in one way or another to Imām Ḥusayn or al-ʿAbbās and the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrdom story. These constitute a cultural landscape of Karbalāʾ as a sacred city representing and reproducing collective identity through sacred spaces, rituals and collective memory.[734] In addition, major and minor pilgrimage places and sacred spaces construct the city of Karbalāʾ as a sacred site of collective transnational Shīʿī identity.[735] Figure 9 offers a macro-level illustration of Karbalāʾs urban geography and the myriad sacred spaces

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[732] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021, (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[733] Moustafa Al-Qazwini, "Inquiries About Shiʿa Islam: Infallibility", *al-Islam.org*, n.d., https://www.al-islam.org/inquiries-about-shia-islam-sayyid-moustafa-al-qazwini/introduction.

[734] This is reminiscent of what Pemberton describes a "topography of power". See John Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 270.

[735] This resembles Quinn's depiction of the "living pilgrimage" which contains multiple tombs, monuments, sacred landscapes and shrines in Java. See George Quinn, *Bandit Saints of Java: How Java's Eccentric Saints Are Challenging Fundamentalist Islam in Modern Indonesia* (Leicestershire: Monsoon Books, 2019), 14.

central to the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrdom narrative. The table in Figure 10 lists these sacred spaces. Each of these spaces in Karbalāʾ contributes to the reproduction of collective identity based on the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn. The following sections depict various meso-level conceptualisations of these localities and critically examines their significance to collective transnational Shīʿī identity due to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

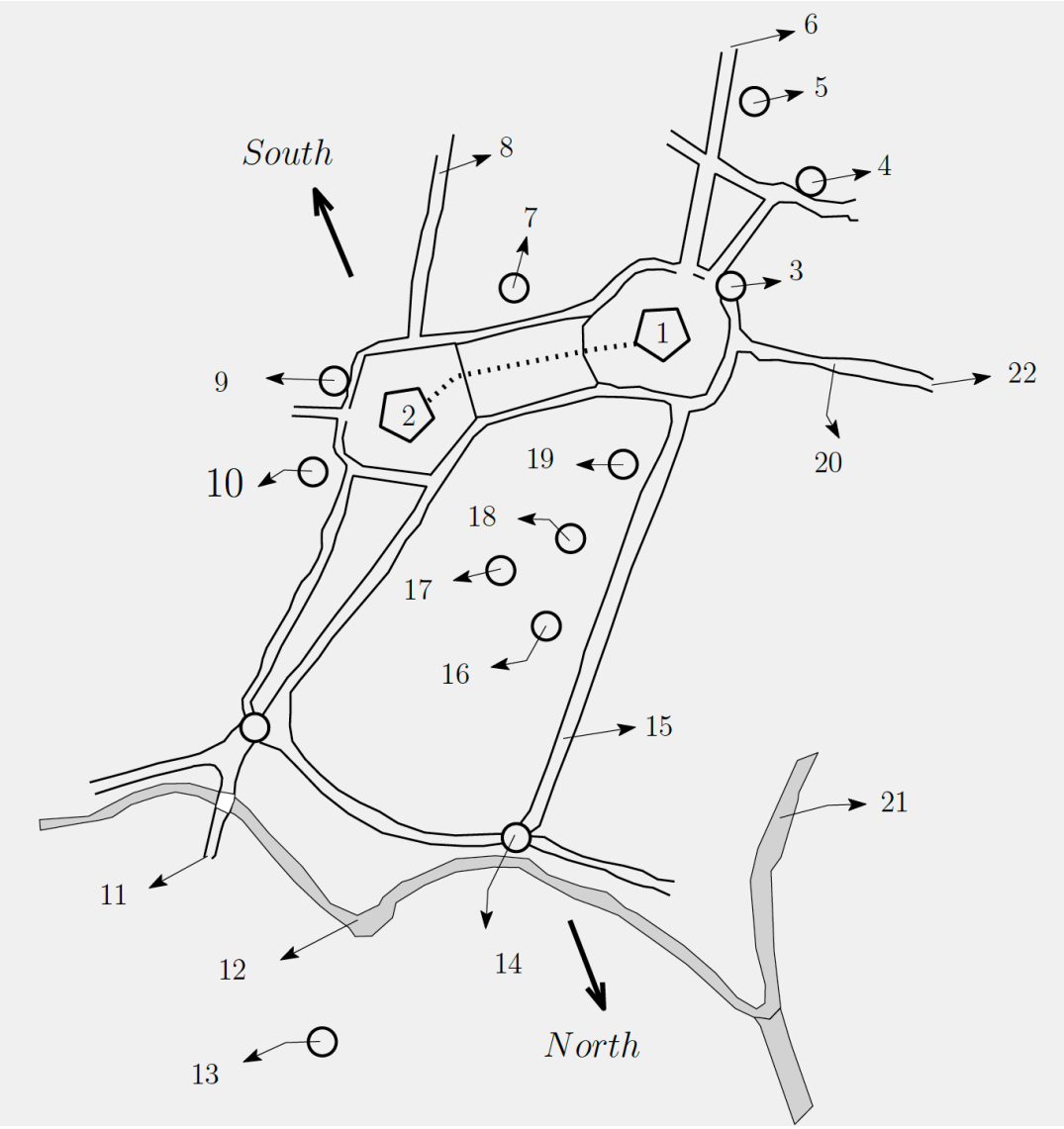

FIGURE 9 - KARBALĀʾS MAJOR AND MINOR PILGRIMAGE SPACES AND PLACES SOURCE: ORIGINAL SOURCE ADAPTED BY SKETCH PROVIDED BY MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI, 2021.

1. Imam al-Husayn holy shrine 2. Al-ʿAbbās's holy shrine 3. Lady Zaynab's Hillock 4. Imam al-Husayn's Encampment 5. The Tomb of Ahmad b. Fahd al Hilli 6. Imam al-Husayn's Qiblah Avenue 7. Lady Fiddah's maqām (spot) 8. Al 'Abbās Qiblah Avenue 9. Al 'Abbās's left hand maqām (spot) 10. Al 'Abbās's right hand maqām (spot)	11. Road towards Baghdad 12. Al-Husaynīyyah Brook 13. Imam Ja'far al-Sādiq's maqām 14. Imam al-Mahdi maqām 15. Al-Sidrah Street 16. Meeting place of Imam al-Husayn & Umayyad general 'Umar b. Said 17. Imam Mūsā b. Ja'far's maqām 18. Alī al-Akbar's maqām 19. 'Ali al-Asghar's maqām 20. Al-Shuhadā (Martyrs) Street 21. Al-Hindiyyyah Brook 22. The direction of the tomb of al-Hurr (West of Karbala)

FIGURE 10 - SACRED SPACES AND PLACES ILLUSTRATED IN FIGURE 9. SOURCE: INFORMATION INFORMING SKETCH BY MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI PROVIDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY SHRINE OF IMĀM AL-HUSAYN, 2021

Imām al-Ḥusayn's Holy Sanctuary

The main building of Imām Al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary and its several consecrated spots symbolise a sacred core within a broader peripheral concentric sacred space.[736] This holy sanctuary contains several cultural objects and collective tombs of ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs which, one can argue, fosters collective Shīʿī identity. Multiple spots within the core and periphery of the shrine contribute to the space's sacredness in Shīʿī Islam and its attractiveness as a site of

[736] Figure 11

pilgrimage and ritual. Each spot implies distinct meaning and evokes distinct memories related to the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ.

Figure 11 depicts the main building of Imām Al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary and its numerous sacred spaces. This holy sanctuary contains several cultural objects and collective tombs of ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs, fostering collective identity. Several features within the core and periphery of the shrine contribute to the space's sacredness in Shīʿī Islam. Each nodal feature represents distinct meanings and memories related to the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative. Point 1 is the sacred core and centre of the broader holy sanctuary and the whole city: Imām al-Ḥusayn's tomb. Point 2 is the tomb of Imām al-Ḥusayn's elder son ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar (ʿAlī the Elder/Junior). ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar is buried at the feet of Imām al-Ḥusayn within the same grating (point 3). Point 3 encompasses the metal grating, which covers the area beneath the sacred grating of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Just outside the sacred grating, approximately four metres from the feet of ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar's tomb, is the tomb of the collective martyrs (point 4). This collective tomb contains the bodies of several martyrs who died on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ with Imām al-Ḥusayn.

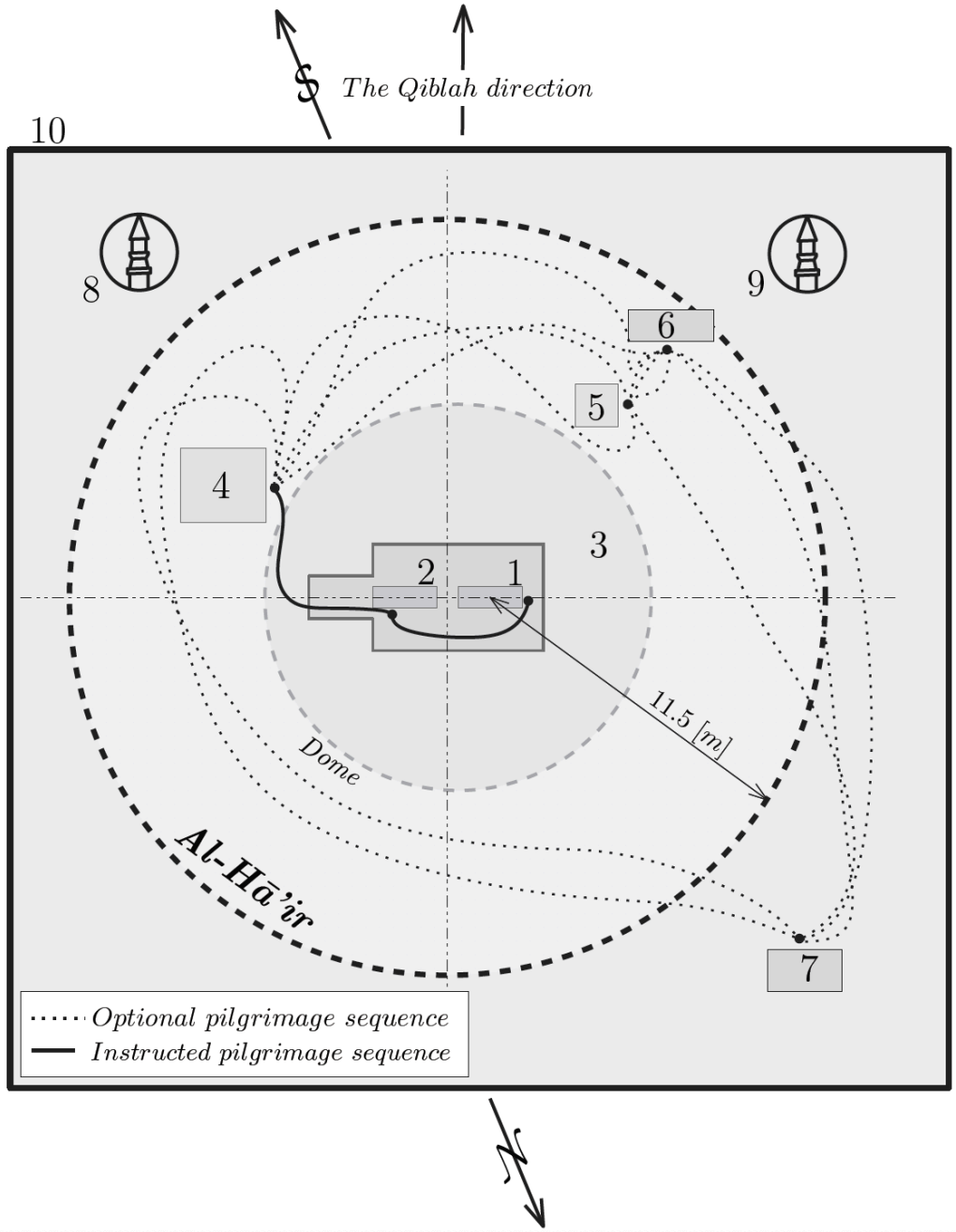

FIGURE 11 - CONCENTRIC AND OTHER PERIPHERAL SACRED PLACES AND SPACES AT IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN'S HOLY SHRINE IN KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: ORIGINAL GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM SKETCH PROVIDED BY, AND CONVERSATIONS WITH MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI, 2021.

Imām al-Ḥusayn's Shrine and Pilgrimage Sequence

Islamic instruction asserts that pilgrims start the pilgrimage by paying zīyārat (pilgrimage) to Imām al-Ḥusayn, then to ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar, and then the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. This sequence from 1

to 2 and then 4 is regarded as the instructed pilgrimage sequence. However, points of departure from 4 to 6-9 are optional pathways of visitation.[737] This sequence implies that while points 1-4 represent instructed pilgrimage, points 6-9 reflect potential pathways connecting the pilgrimage between sacred cores and peripheral sacred spaces. Collectively, the pilgrimage sequence within Imām Al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary demonstrates one instance where Karbalāʾ reproduces collective identity through the memorialisation of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces.

Imām al-Ḥusayn's tomb is the sacred core and centre of the holy shrine sanctuary and the entire city of Karbalāʾ (Point 1). Outside the sacred core, approximately four metres from the feet of ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar's tomb, is the tomb of the collective martyrs (point 4). The collective tomb contains the bodies of several martyrs who died on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ with Imām al-Ḥusayn. Located just outside the sacred grating and dome of Imām al-Ḥusayn is the tomb of Ḥabīb ibn Muẓāhir al-Asadī (point 5). al-Asadī was a close aged companion of Imām ʿAlī and one of the most elderly ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. Typically, pilgrims visiting Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary will first offer salaams (salutations) to Imām al-Ḥusayn and his martyred elder son, ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar, and then to the collective tomb of ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. After this, they will visit the tomb and burial chamber of the aged ʿĀshūrāʾ martyr Ḥabīb ibn Muẓāhir al-Asadī, and then turn to Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Mujāb (point 6). Next to al-Asadī's tomb is the burial chamber of Ibrāhim al-Mujāb, grandson of the seventh Infallible Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim. The photograph in Figure 12 from inside the sacred sanctuary captures the distance of 4.5 metres between the tomb of ʿAlī al-ʾAkbar and the collective tomb of martyrs.

[737] Interview Qom-based religio-pragmatics expert 26 September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

FIGURE 12 – INSIDE IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN'S HOLY SHRINE. TO THE RIGHT IS THE GRATING OF IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN, WITH THE NARROWER GRATING FOR HIS MARTYRED SON. TO THE LEFT IS THE COLLECTIVE TOMB AND GRATING OF THE ʿĀSHŪRĀʾ MARTYRS, WITH THEIR NAMES INSCRIBED OVER THE METAL GRATING.
SOURCE: AHMAD ALAVI, *IRAQ*: RAHNEMA-YE SAFAR-E ZIYĀRATI (IRAQ: TRAVEL GUIDE, 2010),738.

738 HQ Version available from, "Photo Gallery", ImāmHussain.org, n.d., https://pic.imāmhussain.org/gallery/show/1093.

FIGURE 13 - THE TOMB AND GRATING OF THE ELDERLY MARTYR, ḤABĪB IBN MUẒĀHIR AL-ASADĪ. SOURCE: "THE TEXT OF JABIB IBN MAZAHIR SHRINE" , BABLOHARAM.NET, N.D., HTTPS://BABOLHARAM.NET/متن-روضه-حبیب-بن-مظاهر/.

Generations of Ibrāhīm al-Mujāb's descendants took charge of the protection and administration of Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy shrine. Many Shīʿī believe that the Infallibles hear their salaams and answer their salaams; however, the Imāms cannot hear their voice. It is said that Ibrāhīm al-Mujāb and many other mystics heard the voice of Imām al-Ḥusayn from inside his burial sepulchre.[739] Descendent of al-Mujāb and son of famous Karbalāʾ historian Sayyid Salmaan, Salmaan Aal Tuʾmah recounted that his father, grandfather, great-grandfather and

[739] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 11 March 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079); The Oxford language dictionary defines a "sepulchre" as a small room or monument build with rocks or stones in which dead bodies are laid and buried; In earlier drafts of this thesis, I was pressed on the issue of which other mystics heard such voices. The answer as to why this is unknown exists the fact that "mystics" were atypical nominal professions. Mystics seldom declared, professed, or recounted such encounters with others due precisely to its religiously individual and intersubjective nature.

ancestors discharged their services to Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary.[740] Tuʾmah conducted foundational studies on tribes and families in Karbalāʾ and Karbalāʾ in Shīʿī memory.[741] Tuʾmah's scholarly and lineal associations to the shrine helped establish himself as a reputable scholar in the Shīʿī world. Qualifying the influence of Salmaan Tuʾmah, a Qom-based religio-pragmatics expert said, "In the world of Ḥusayni scholarship, when there is a reference to the books of Dr. Sayyid Salmaan Aal Tuʾmah, it means the end of research and scholarship in the field. He is the ultimate say".[742] This highlights the historical construction of collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ as linking occupation, scholarship and lineage.

The ʿAlid council constructed the easterly and westerly minarets in 280 AH/893 AD. They were designed to be on either side of the sacred cores, facing the direction of the Qiblah. In 780/1384, the two minarets were reconstructed of gold by Sultan Ahmad ibn ʿUways. The importance of the direction of the Qiblah as it relates to Shīʿī ritual is noteworthy. The Qiblah is the direction towards the Kaaba inside the sacred Mosque in Mecca, located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The direction of the Qiblah in mosques and shrines is significant during pilgrimage ritualisation. Corpses are buried on their right shoulders such that they are facing the Qiblah. When paying pilgrimage to Imām al-Ḥusayn or other dignitaries, Islamic instruction asserts that pilgrims stand facing the tomb and when the Qiblah falls behind them as if they are paying salaam to a living person. In 1360 AH/1941 AD, Dr Syed Taher Saifuddin contributed to reconstructing the westerly minaret with a considerable amount of gold plating

[740] Interview with Dr. Ahmad Salmaan Aal Tuʾmah, 5 October 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[741] Salmān Hādī Tuʾmah, *Karbalāʾ fī al-dhākirah (Memories of Karbalāʾ)* (Baghdad: Matḅaʿat al-ʿĀnī, 1988); Salmān Hādī Tu'mah, *Asha'er Karbalāʾ Wa 'Usariha (Tribes and Families of Karbalāʾ)* (Beirut: Dar al-Mahaja al-Baydha', 1998).

[742] Interview, Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

embedded into its structure. The following section discusses the significance of the al-Hāʿir sacred zone.

The al-Hāʿir Sacred Zone within Imām al-Ḥusayn's Holy Sanctuary

All the aforementioned focal points are contained within the concentric circle al-Hāʿir sacred zone, which contains the sacred core of Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy shrine and encompasses the broader periphery of the holy sanctuary. It is an unmarked area of approximately 11.5 metres in all directions from Imām al-Ḥusayn's tomb. Due to its spatial sacredness, travelling pilgrims can perform three- and four- *rak'at* (prostration) mandatory *salats* (prayer facing the Qiblah) either in a complete or shortened form inside. The al-Hāʿir implies that no traveller is counted as a stranger because the radius is the home of all believers.[743] In this way, it resembles Klauser's notion of the "sphere", as "a socially created, self-animating space in which a commonality of experiences is rendered possible where human beings find protective refuge".[744] Located outside the al-Hāʿir sacred zone is the *Qatligāh* (sacrificing place), the exact martyrdom spot where Shimr beheaded Imām al-Ḥusayn on ʿĀshūrāʾ. The *Qatligāh* has a gate from inside the shrine that is occasionally open to the pilgrims. In recent years, a window was installed from the outer wall, near the foot of the westerly minaret, in the courtyard through which pilgrims witness and experience what is considered the most tragic spot in the sequence of events commemorated at ʿĀshūrāʾ.[745] Having established the *zīyārat* sequence and ʿĀshūrāʾ-

[743] Unpublished note by Muḥammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, 26 September 2021.

[744] Francisco Klauser, "Splintering Spheres of Security: Peter Sloterdijk and the Contemporary Fortress City", *Environment and Planning D-society & Space* 28 (2010): 326-340, 329.

[745] Interview, Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

related sites within Imām al-Ḥusayn's Holy Sanctuary, the following section outlines the sacralised spaces in Karbalāʾ's broader pilgrimage locus.

Sacralised Spaces

Cultural cartographic plans of Karbalāʾ highlight how its main pilgrimage promenade links sequence within Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary with several other ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented sites of collective Shīʿī identity. Connecting the shrines of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his younger half-brother al-ʿAbbās is a pathway or thoroughfare known as the Bayn al-Haramayn (Between the two shrines). Between 1973 and 1987, Iraq's Endowment Ministry undertook administration of the holy shrines. In 1979, buildings, historical monuments, seminaries and mosques were demolished, creating a new open space for the Bayn al-Haramayn.[746] Figures 14 provides a cultural cartographic depiction of the Bayn al-Haramayn in relation to other ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces.

[746] Nadhir al-Kazraji, *Nuzhat al-Qalam* [The Expedition of a Pen] (in Arabic) (London: Hussanini Centre for Research, n.d.), 306.

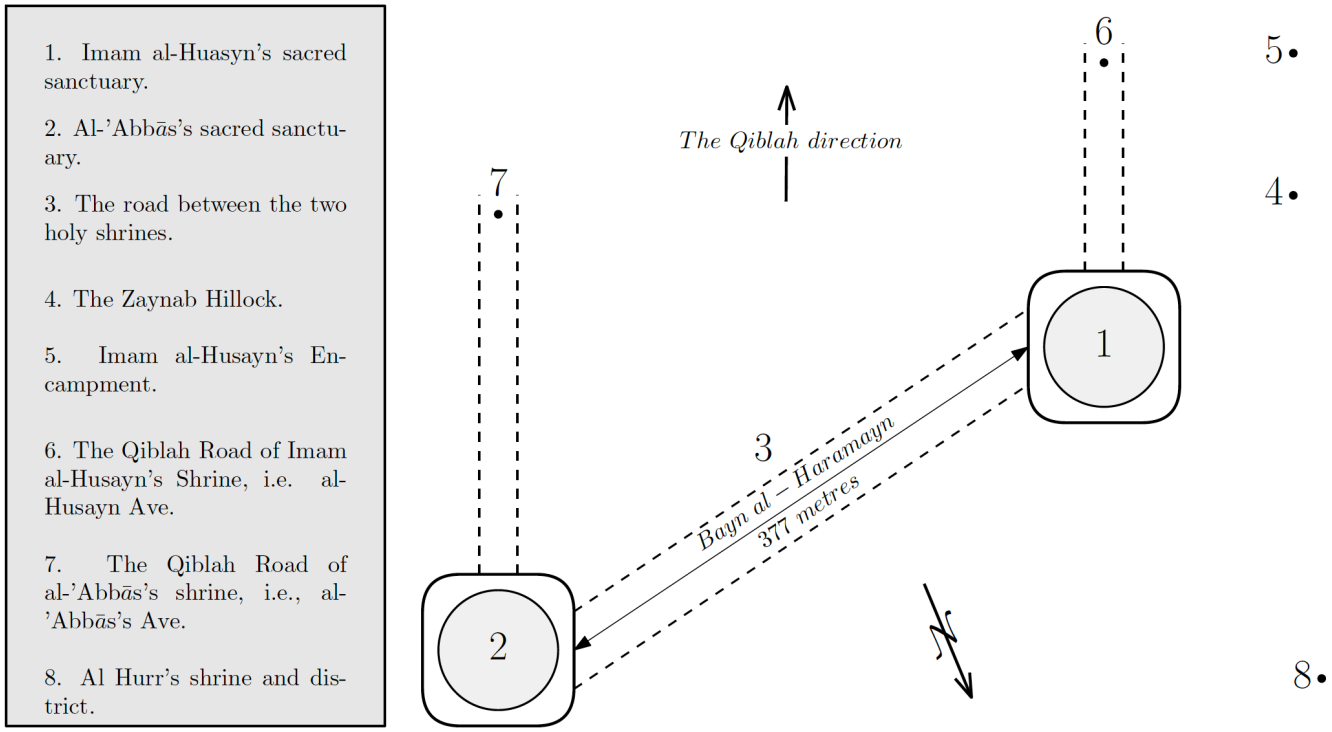

FIGURE 14 - A PLAN OF THE MAIN PILGRIMAGE SITES IN KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: ORIGINAL GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM SKETCH PROVIDED BY MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI, 2021.

In 1997, the city council laid the street with cement and planted palm trees along the two sides of the road. Palm trees symbolise Mesopotamia and allude to an Arab region.[747] This initiative by then-President Saddam Hussein was done to minimise Persian-Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ. After the 1991 Karbalāʾ uprisings, most of the buildings adjacent to the shrines were reduced to rubble.[748] The Iraqi government initiated new programs to expand religious sites in Karbalāʾ

[747] Maan Jalal, "'Nakhla': the Arabic Word for Palm Tree – an Enduring Symbol of the Region", *The National News*, 21 January 2023, https://www.thenationalnews.com/weekend/2023/01/20/nakhla-the-arabic-word-for-palm-tree-an-enduring-symbol-of-the-region/.

[748] For first hand details and accounts of this event see Alex MacDonald, "The Shia of Karbalāʾ: Where Remembrance and Tradition are One", *Middle East Eye*, 29 May 2016, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/shia-Karbalāʾ-where-remembrance-and-tradition-are-one; Dave Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein", *PBS Frontline World*, 24 January 2006, http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq501/events_uprising.html; Tom Happold, "Saddam 'Intends to Damage Holy Sites'", *The Guardian*, 3 April 2003, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/apr/02/iraq.iraq1.

designed to attract pilgrims and facilitate a pedestrian space between the two shrines. For the convenience of pilgrims, shops, marketplaces and other spaces were constructed on either side. By 2013, the area's pathway was paved with Italian marble, and several infrastructural developments were made to modernise the area. Figure 15 and Figure 16 depict the modernised Bayn al-Haramayn from street and aerial viewpoints. Having established the geography of Karbalāʾs main pilgrimage promenade, the following sections outline poetically prescribed spaces and rituals associated with the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage.

FIGURE 15 - THE MODERNISED BAYN AL- HARAMAYN PEDESTRIAN. SOURCE: "PHOTO GALLERY", IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG, N.D., HTTPS://PIC.IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG/GALLERY/SHOW/16149.

FIGURE 16 - AERIAL VIEW OF BAYN AL-HARAMAYN PEDESTRIAN DURING ʿĀSHŪRĀʾ AT NIGHT. SOURCE: "IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG – PHOTO GALLERY. N.D., HTTPS://PIC.IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG/GALLERY/SHOW/16175.

Poetically Prescribed Spaces of Ritual

In Shīʿī ritual, specific spaces are considered sacred. While these non-gravesite places can be regarded as second-rate pilgrimage places, they contribute to the reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity. Thus, Karbalāʾ represents a form of manifold collective identity. However, some distinctions must be made between rituals and objects and objects related to those rituals. This distinction can be made by dividing Ḥusayni rituals into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary rituals refer to those explicitly explicated in Shīʿī religious texts. Such rituals are regarded as primary or main rituals. In her seminal text, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* Bell proposed "a more holistic and pragmatic orientation to multiple dimensions

of the phenomenon of ritual".[749] However, a distinction was not made distinctions between primary and peripheral rituals. In the context of Shīʿīte rituals, secondary rituals are those which have developed through the centuries but do not explicitly mention in primacy texts. These may be regarded as secondary or ephemeral sacred texts.

When classifying and categorising institutions of collective identity such as poetically ritualised places, spaces and spots, the salience of such practices is essential to understanding them in a sophisticated and accurate manner. In Karbalāʾ, two noteworthy examples exist. The first is the place where al-ʿAbbās' right hand was cut off.[750] The second is the place where al-ʿAbbās' left hand was severed on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ. These places are called maqāms. They are located on the north side but somewhat on the left and the right sides of al-ʿAbbās's sacred sanctuary. In Persian, *maqām* means "status, ranking, position, situation". In Arabic, it means the same with additional meanings of "place, location" as well as those mentioned in the case of Persian.[751] Figure 17 depicts the *maqāam* of ʿAbbās' right hand in Karbalāʾ.

[749] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), ix.

[750] Figure 17.

[751] Muhammmad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopaedic Dictionary: A Reference Guide to People, Places, Events, Concepts and Rituals* (Karbalāʾ: Imām al-Ḥusayn's Holy Shrine, 2019), 51.

FIGURE 17 - THE MAQĀM OF 'ABBĀS' RIGHT HAND IN KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: SEPIDEH PARAPAJOUH, "THE TOPOGRAPHY OF CORPORAL RELICS IN TWELVER SHĪʿĪSM: SOME ANTHROPOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PLACES OF ZIYĀRA", JOURNAL OF MATERIAL CULTURES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD 1 (2020): 199-225, 215.

This *maqāam* is significant because it depicts the site where ʿAbbās' right hand was cut off on the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ Karbalāʾ. The day of ʿĀshūrāʾ brought immense thirst and suffering to Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans, this motif of the martyrs' thirst is well-documented in all ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature.[752] To relieve their thirst ʿAbbās' rode on horseback to the River Alqamee to fetch water. As he returned with water, One of ʿUmar b. Saʿd's soldiers had been hiding behind a palm tree and ambushed him. ʿĀshūrāʾ literature records that due to the soldier's cowardice, fearing ʿAbbās' might and strength, he struck and severed ʿAbbās' right hand.[753] The hand fell on the group right on the spot where the *maqāam* is located. This

[752] Muhammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani, "(Re-)defining Some Genre-Specific Words: Evidence from some English Texts about Ashura", *Oxford University Research Archive*, 2010, https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:8307ae11-21a4-4a2e-95b0-cb76d59212fb/download_file?file_format=application%2Fpdf&safe_filename=%28Re-%29defining%2Bsome%2Bgenre-specific%2Bwords%3A%2Bevidence%2Bfrom%2Bsome%2BEnglish%2Btexts%2Babout%2BAshura&type_of_work=Conference+item

[753] "The Right Hand of al-Abbas Site", *International Media Center*, 14 September 2020, https://imhussain.com/english/holysites/1621

physical representation signifies this event leading up to the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn and contributes to the coherence of the ʿĀshūrāʾ story – reproducing collective Shīʿī identity.

Another example of a prescribed ritual spot is where Imām al-Ḥusayn met the Umayyad general and army commander, ʿUmar b. Saʿd, on the eve of ʿĀshūrāʾ. At this spot, Imām al-Ḥusayn tried to dissuade the Umayyad general not to wage war on the ensuing day. Rituals can be distinguished by the degree to which they are regarded as first-rate or essential, in contrast to second-rate, additional, peripheral or supplementary rituals. One such example is the controversial ʿĀshūrāʾ ritual of *taṭbīr*, a second-rate ritual practised fervently in Karbalāʾ and occasionally in Najaf. *Taṭbīr* is a bloodletting mourning ritual where mourners beat their heads with qama (daggers), yelling "Hayder, Hayder" while drums and horns are played.[754] The phrase refers to Imām al-Ḥusayn's father Imām ʿAlī, who was named Hayder by his mother before the Prophet insisted that he be named Ali instead.[755] Several other focal points in the above figures relevant to Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity require elaboration, such as the Zaynab Hillock.

[754] Werner Ende, "The Flagellations of Muharram and the Shi'ite 'Ulama", *Der Islam* 55:1 (1978): 19-36.

[755] Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of Āshurā"; Although *taṭbīr* has not been part of Ḥusayni rituals in any primary texts, some people have come to endorse it as a primary, first-rate ritual. However, a vast majority of Shīʿīs reject the practice outright. Proponents of the practice include Mirza Na'ini, Muḥammad Taqī Bahgat and Mirza Jawad Tabrizi. Opponents of the practice include, Sayyid Abu Ḥasan al-Isfahani, Mushin al-Amin, Ḥusayn Mazdhiri, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī, Imām Khomeini and Imām Khamenei.

FIGURE 18 – THE MEETING PLACE OF IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN AND UMAYYAD GENERAL, UMAR B. SA`D, ON THE EVE OF ʿĀSHŪRĀʾ. SOURCE: AHMAD ALAVI, IRAQ: RAHNEMA-YE SAFAR-E ZIYĀRATI (IRAQ: TRAVEL GUIDE, 2010).

The Zaynab Hillock

The Zaynab Hillock was a small hill near the Karbalāʾ battlefield. It is said Imām al-Ḥusayn's sister, Zaynab climbed the hill to gain a vantage point to monitor the battles between Imām al-Ḥusayn and his enemies. Some Arabic translations of the space call it "Zainabiya Hill". Al-Sawaf writes,[756]

> Zainabiyya Hill is a name given to one of the shrines built near the shrine of Imām Hussein (peace be upon him) on a high place similar to a hill, where the centre of the building is a dome covered with the magnificent Karbalāʾi Kashi. Kāshī [Kāshī is a Persian word which means ceramic tile],

[756] Muḥammad Hamid Al-Sawaf, Karbalāʾ ra'iat al-tarikh wa adhirat al-Amal. [Karbalāʾ: The Beauty of History and Representation of Hope], *annabaa.org*, n.d., https://annabaa.org/nbahome/nba74/karblaa.htm.

and the outer walls are covered with Turkish marble, and from the inside with beautiful ceramic mirror.

Objectively speaking, the Zaynab Hillock is not a large hill by any means, rather a slightly elevated piece of ground. The main spot of the Karbalāʾ battlefield was somewhat lower than its surrounding parts. It remains this way, as when one enters Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary, there are a number of downward sloping passages or stairwells, given the tomb is situated lower than the street surface. The Zaynab Hillock is near the Qiblah-side or southern outer walls of Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary. It is located on the opposite side of the street, forming a circuit around Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary.[757]

A small mosque was later built in the same elevated place to mark Zaynab's presence and sufferings at this space. Thus, the Zaynab Hillock has become a symbolic memorial of the original hillock during the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. One participant referred to Zaynab as the "mountain of patience".[758] Emphasising Zaynab's centrality to ʿĀshūrāʾ, he asserted, "She proves definitely that she is stronger than everyone and everything. Unless she was present in the Battle and after it, much would have been unknown".[759] In Shīʿī Islam, Zaynab is revered as a figure of divine courage and strength because of her role in ʿĀshūrāʾ and subsequent captivity in Damascus at the Mamluk court. The current Zaynab Hillock Mosque is thought to be where lady Zaynab stood and wept out to her brother Imām al-Ḥusayn after ʿUbayd Allāh Ibn Ziyād's army attacked their encampment. The 'Hill' underwent thorough renovations in

[757] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021. (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[758] Interview with Karbalāʾ based Shīʿī intellectual, 25 September 2021. (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[759] Interview with Karbalāʾ based Shīʿī intellectual, 26 September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

2004 with the addition of interior marble walls and a pure silver net with lights. Figure 19 depicts the renovated mosque located at the Zaynab Hillock.

FIGURE 19 - THE CURRENT ZAYNAB HILLOCK MOSQUE, POST-RENOVATIONS. SOURCE: "AL-ZAYNABEE HILL", IMĀM HUSSAIN HOLY SHRINE, 20 MAY 2018, HTTPS://IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG/ENGLISH/KARBALĀʾ/18071.

The current mosque is donned with green ornaments and banners. In Shīʿī Islam, green symbolises purity, fertility and peace.[760] The dome on the mosque has distinct blue tiling. In Shīʿīsm, blue symbolises water, tranquillity, heaven, peace of mind, and peacefulness. The marble and grating beneath it are textured with red and white colours. The red, white and blue combination represents a unique contrast. In Shīʿīsm, white symbolises innocence, peace, perfection and purity of the soul, while red symbolises blood and the continual revolution of

[760] Because green is a combination of yellow and blue, yellow symbolises the heavenly sun realm while blue denotes the earth and worldly life "as its surface is 70% water. This implies that humans are a divine blend of heaven and earthly attributes. Furthermore, green is associated with life, spring and resurrection. Hence the Arabic word for paradise (Jannah) meaning garden, a poetic image universally associated with green. See Beth Davies-Stofka, "Rituals and Worship: Symbolism", Patheos *Religion Library*, n.d., https://www.patheos.com/library/islam/ritual-worship-devotion-symbolism/symbolism?offset=1&max=1.

ʿĀshūrāʾ and enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt.[761] In some ways, the Zaynab Hillock dome represents an architectural contrast between good and evil. The circular blue dome represents tranquillity and peacefulness. As in many other faiths, Shīʿīsm views the circle to be a perfect geometrical shape.[762] The circle represents perfection, sublimity, devoid imperfection and all-inclusivity. For these reasons, the base of domes always takes the form of a circle.

The Zaynab Hillock is a symbolic structure. It does not intend to replicate the precise dimensions or shape of the hill Zaynab sat atop during the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Instead, it is a reference to her important role in the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Like other non-gravesites within the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage, the Hillock is not a creative elaboration of the actual hill. Rather, it is a central claim to legitimacy in Shīʿī history. It is not conceived as an accurate topographical assertion, but as an affirmation of cultural genealogy in Shīʿī history which legitimises the events leading up to ʿĀshūrāʾ. This non gravesite monument assumes an alternative symbolic meaning of expression, essence, and continuity.[763] Its modern representation is an elaborate mosque with a specifically crafted dome and selected lights, personifying Zaynab's courage

[761] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 26 September 2021. (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[762] Hossein R. Sarand, Mohammadreza P. Fard and Akbar A. Taraf, "The Secret of "Circle" in Islamic Architecture", *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art and Communication* (April 2016): 108-118; For non-Islamic examples, see Abraham Seidenberg, "The Ritual Origin of the Circle and Square", *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 25:4 (1981): 269-32; Evgeny A. Zaitsev, "The Meaning of Early Medieval Geometry: From Euclid Surveyors' Manuals to Christian Philosophy", *The History of Science Society* 90:3 (September 1999): 522-553.

[763] The development of the Zaynab Hillock resembles what Pemberton refers to as "future anterior foresight". As intentionally designed so its "always-already mode of production would extend the present into the future by recalling the past "tradition". See Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"*, 188.

and bravery during and after ʿĀshūrāʾ.[764] The Zaynab Hillock not only reminds pilgrims of Zaynab's resistance during ʿĀshūrāʾ, but also her survival which consequently protected the lineage of the Imams and the Imamate. Figure 20 captures the essence and continuity of Zaynab in the modern dome. Another similarly prescribed sacred space in Karbalāʾ is Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment.

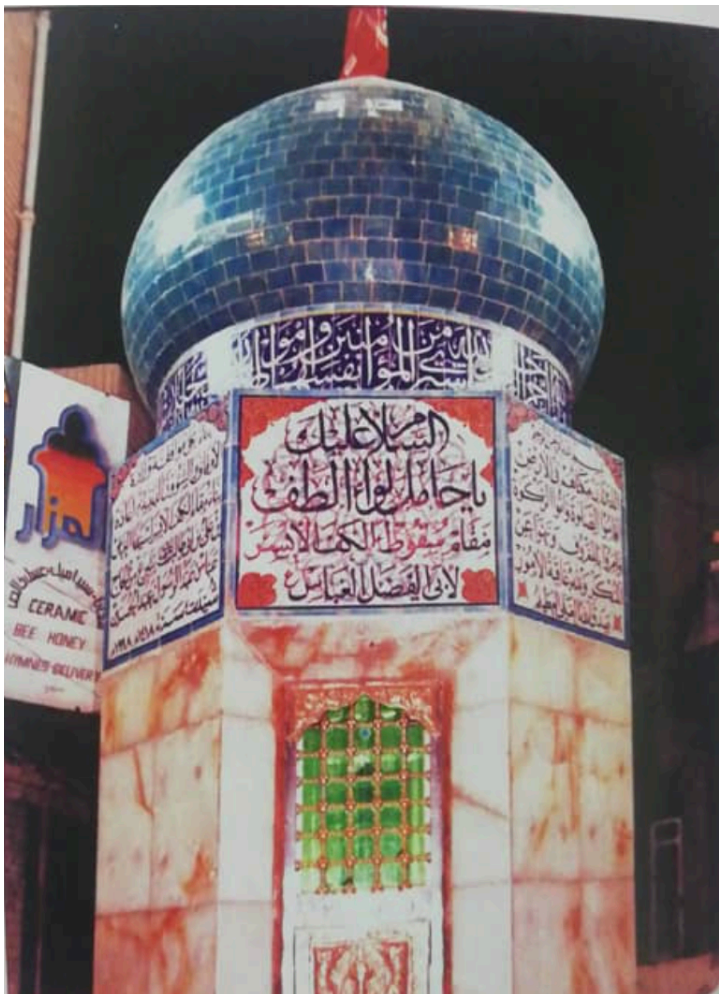

FIGURE 20 - THE ZAYNAB HILLOCK DOME. SOURCE: AHMAD ALAVI, IRAQ: RAHNEMA-YE SAFAR-E ZIYĀRATI (IRAQ: TRAVEL GUIDE, 2010).

[764] There is a significant literature of the role of women in the Karbalāʾ narrative. See for instance, Peter Chelkowski, "Iconography of the Women of Karbala: Tiles, Murals, Stamps, and Posters", in *The Women of Karbala*, ed. Aghaie, 119-139, 129.

Imām al-Ḥusayn's Encampment and Al-Hurr

Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity is not solely due to the shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn. It is not one site, with one spiritual meaning, nor one tomb within the site but rather a complex assemblage of sites which, taken together, reproduce ritualised collective identity based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Several loci of ritualised sacred spaces contribute to the reproduction of collective identity. One such locus of ritualised collective identity is Imām Ḥusayn's encampment. Pragmatically, 'encampment' refers to the location of a camp at a specific time. Accordingly, Imām Ḥusayn's encampment location during the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ does not precisely match the current place where his presence is sacralised. Although Ḥusayn's encampment does not match the location of Imām Ḥusayn's holy shrine, it remains a sacralised space of poetically prescribed ritual. The modern edifice symbolises Imām al-Ḥusayn's historical encampment before the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Figure 21 depicts the current form of Imām al-Ḥusayn's "encampment". The camp has two large blue-green domes situated above the position of the tents Imām al-Ḥusayn and his followers resided in after arriving from Medina.

FIGURE 21 - THE CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATION OF IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN'S 'ENCAMPMENT'. SOURCE: "THE CAMP OF IMĀM HUSSAIN", IMĀM HUSSAIN HOLY SHRINE, 20 MAY 2018, HTTPS://IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG/ENGLISH/KARBALĀʾ/18070.

Many prominent Najafi clerics believe that the place which is regarded as the place of Imām Ḥusayn's encampment is simply a symbolic place representing a much larger area, diminishing the historical accuracy of the "real life" encampment site. Several Najafi scholars concur, agreeing that Imām Ḥusayn's encampment was, in reality, vast. According to a Qom-based religio-pragmatics expert, the size of the encampment in Karbalāʾ, he recalled:

> Based on sound historical research, Ayatollah Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Mousawi Abu Saʿidah of Najaf, believes that the area chosen for the encampment was really very vast, spanning in a crescent-shape area from the present place through to near the tomb of al-Hurr to the west of the city of Karbalāʾ. The same place was later chosen as a mosque, simply because it is believed that Imām al-Ḥusayn and other prominent martyrs stayed there for approximately nine days.[765]

[765] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

Antrim's "lexicon of territoriality" clarifies some of the confusion regarding Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment.[766] Discussing various terms of lexical territoriality including *manzāzil* (encampment, dwelling), Antrim writes, "Although these words all connote some form of territoriality, they do not necessarily imply immobility or a settled life; a manzil might be a moveable tentlike dwelling, but for the duration of its use it is rooted in the earth".[767] Through this reading, it becomes clear that al-Ḥusayn's exact encampment was an ephemeral place in 680AD and is therefore virtually impossible to ascertain topographically. The exact spot of encampment of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ was a much broader and vaster, crescent-shaped area than what has come to be represented near the Imām al-Ḥusayn holy shrine. The encampment encompassed anyone who abandoned the Umayyads in the hours leading up to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. In this sense, it was an ephemeral space.

Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment harboured his partisans and those who abandoned the Umayyads in the hours leading up to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The current mosque, known as al-Mukhayyam al Ḥusayni in Arabic or Kheymehgāh in Persian, was built as a symbolic edifice denoting the approximately five-kilometre space comprising the ephemeral encampment.[768] The most interesting aspect of Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment is the not the size of the modern-day representation but rather, its fictional nature. This lexical appreciation of territoriality

[766] Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 13-14.

[767] *Ibid*, 15.

[768] Interview Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor 26 September 2021. (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

clarifies the encampment's geographic ambiguity and explains the approximated symbolic edifice's construction southwest of Imām al-Ḥusayn's.

Pred argues that place might be thought of as a "process of becoming".[769] The process in which a space becomes a place depends on how humans imbue meaning through experience. Although the current 'encampment' is a replica, it possesses cultural significance because of the role it plays in the production and negotiation of authenticity. As Foster and Jones note "Relationships between originals, replicas, people and places offers a rounded perspective on what happened, and a temporal understanding of changing values and meaning".[770] Replicas are not designed to replicate the original structure of the site, they function more like cognitive "signposts than reproductions".[771] Sites such as Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment and the Zaynab Hillock are designed to remind visitors of the reference to the place in question. These sites serve as a reference to help the observer identify it within the broader historical events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.[772] In isolation, these replicas have little meaning, but within the broader context of ʿĀshūrāʾs narrative identity, they authenticate and rationalise the historical story of Karbalāʾ. They are not representations of the past, but a simulacrum of the past.[773] Ultimately, the

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[769] Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process", 287.

[770] Sally M. Hoster and Siân Jones, "The Untold Heritage Value and Significance of Replicas", *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 21:1 (2019): 1-24, 13.

[771] Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 179.

[772] Notions of territoriality as places in time are abundant. Wright argues, for instance, that constructed spaces are never confined to the present or concrete but rather encompass spaces of past experiences and memories that reside in the imagination, known as 'geosophies'. See John K. Wright, "Terrae Icognitae: The Place of Imagination", *Geography Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37 (1947): 1-15.

[773] Baudrillard writes, There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éd. Galilée, 1981).

authenticity of these sites is based not on its geographical or structural accuracy, but rather, on their importance to the Shīʿī community and to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.[774] Although it was an ephemeral space, Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment symbolises a necessarily permanent place in the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ Another poetically prescribed sacred space near Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment is the Al-Hurr shrine.

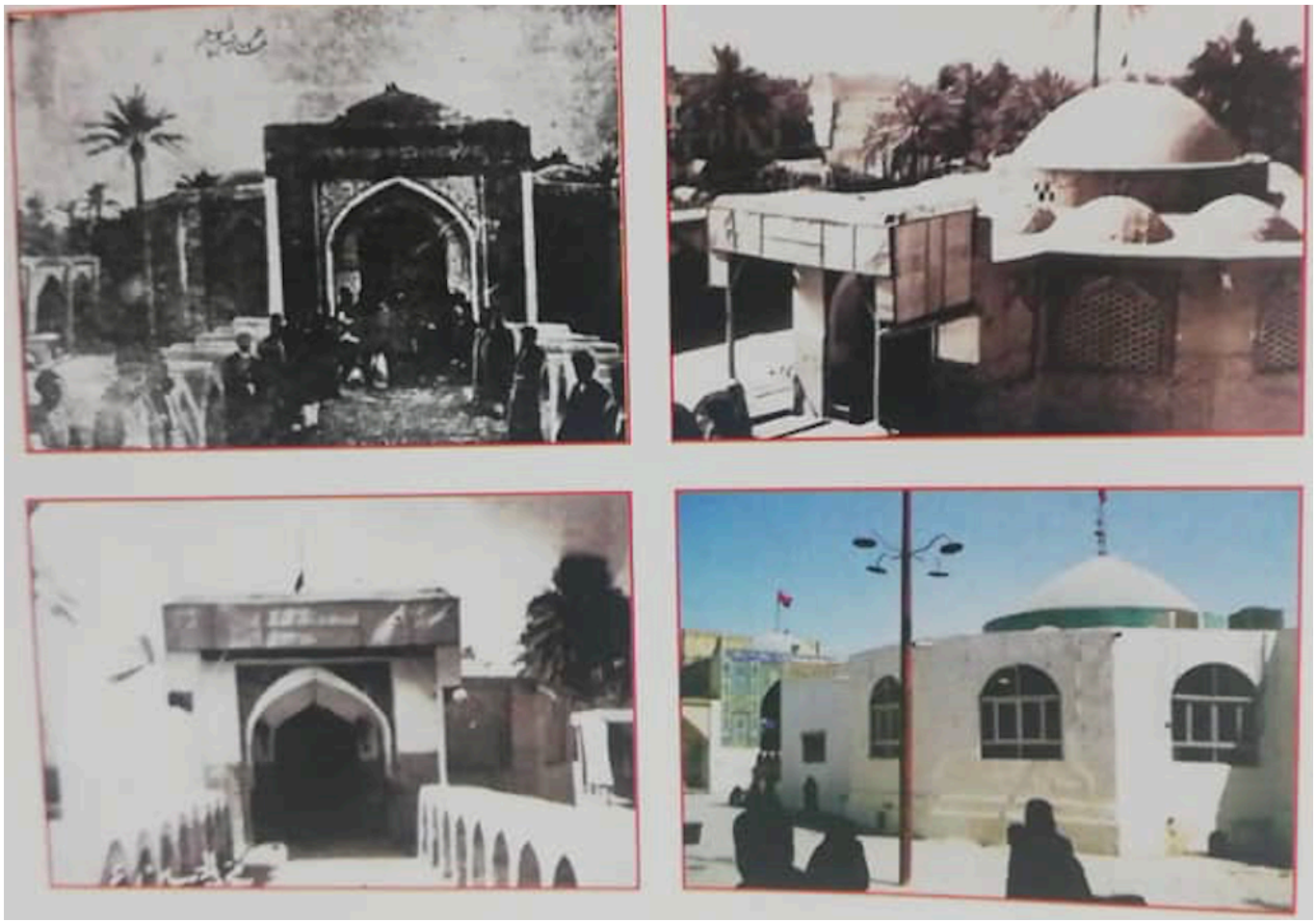

FIGURE 22 - FORMER VIEWS OF THE ḤUSAYNI ENCAMPMENT AT KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: AHMAD ALAVI, IRAQ: RAHNEMA-YE SAFAR-E ZIYĀRATI (IRAQ: TRAVEL GUIDE, 2010).

The al-Hurr shrine is another example of a poetically prescribed sacred space contributing to the reproduction of collective identity in Karbalāʾ. Located approximately seven kilometres

[774] Figure 22 depicts the development of Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment over time.

west of Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacred sanctuary, the shrine links the story of al-Hurr during the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ to collective Shīʿī identity and memory. The story of al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Rīyāḥī (d. 61 AH/680CE) is an important focal point in the broader Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative. Belonging to the Kufan elites, al-Ḥurr was initially a commander for the governor of Kufa, ʿUbayd Allāh b. Zīyād (d. 67 AH/686-87CE) against Imām al-Ḥusayn. Al-Hurr was one of the greatest warriors in Kufa.[775] Al-Hurr is venerated for his repentance on the Day of ʿĀshūrāʾ, switching sides to join Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans. Al-Hurr first intercepted Imām al-Ḥusayn, but later, on the morning of ʿĀshūrāʾ, changed his stance and joined him.

After repenting, Al-Hurr and his son, brother, and one or two soldiers joined Imām al-Ḥusayn's army and went to the battlefield, where he fought valiantly. Several accounts assert that Al-Hurr killed more than 40 of Umar b. Saʿd's soldiers before his eventual martyrdom.[776] After ʿĀshūrāʾ, where al-Hurr died in battle, some of his tribesmen took his body to their district for burial. The Umayyad soldiers did not sever his head, and his shrine remains outside Karbalāʾ. Because of his story, al-Hurr is regarded as a symbol of practical, sincere, and last-minute repentance and salvation. One interpretation of his burial location suggests that someone who joins the revolution later must stand a bit farther, not closer to the centre.[777] Stories such as al-Hurr's give redemptive power to place. This shrine is important because of the tempo-spatial significance of al-Hurr during the historical events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. It does not signify al-Hurr's

[775] Tarikh Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-umam wa l-mulūk* (History of the Prophets and Kings) (Beirut: Dar-i-Seveydan, 1968), 403. It should be noted that the reliability of Tabarī's account is questionable. The aforecited Shīʿī intellectual described Tabarī as a "trumpet" and "loudspeaker" of the ʿAbbāsids, "unfortunately regarded as a master-historian".

[776] Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, 476, 489; 494; 517; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, vol. 2, 102-104; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-umam wa l-mulūk*, vol. 5, 428-429; Khwārizmī, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn*, vol. 2, 13.

[777] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor 26 September 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

meteoric career in the Umayyad army or his habits or beliefs, it signifies his last-minute action joining al-Ḥusayn and accepting martyrdom. Al-Hurr's last-minute conversion on ʿĀshūrāʾ is a powerful story within the broader narrative because it signifies Shīʿī values of repentance, sacrifice, justice and courage. Figure 25 highlights the proximity of these sacred spaces in Karbalāʾ as a cultural cartography which collectively reproduces a living history of the events of ʿĀshūrā. It is the combined presence and significance of these spaces that contribute to this cartography's reproduction of collective Shīʿī identity.[778]

[778] While aligning with Anderson's emphasis on cartography as central to imagined communities, this conception of 'cartography' differs from Anderson's allocation of meaningful cartographic encapsulation to the emergence of the nation state. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 12.

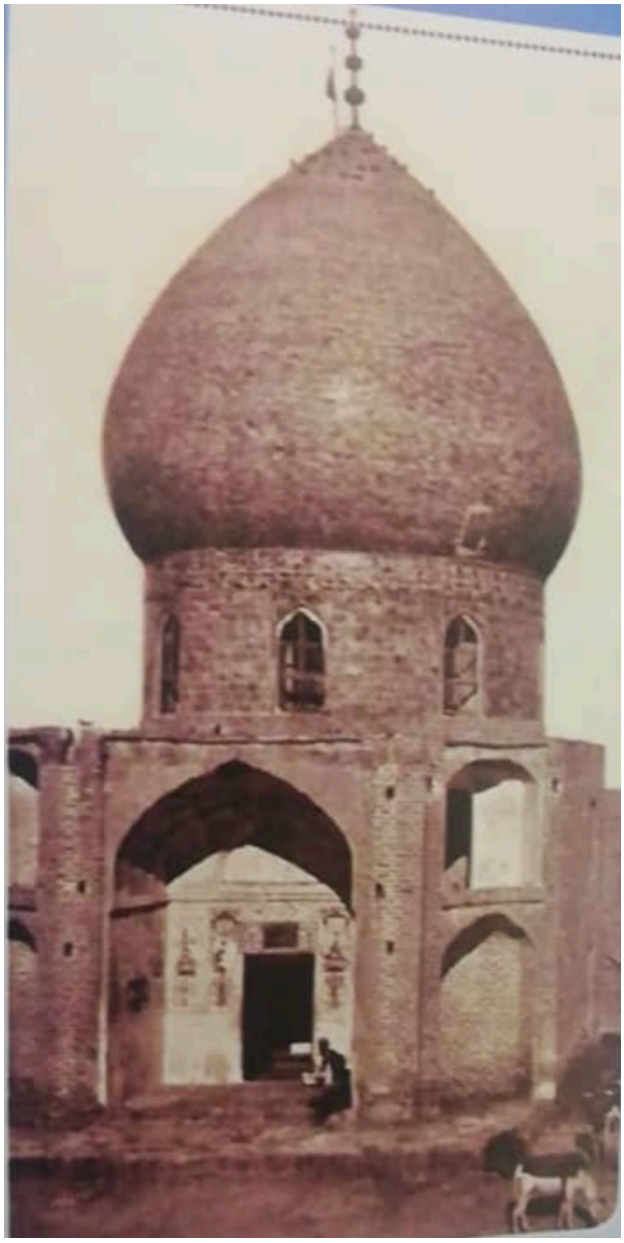

FIGURE 23 - THE SHRINE OF AL-HURR B. YAZID RIYADHI IN THE WESTERN VICINITY OF KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: AHMAD ALAVI, IRAQ: RAHNEMA-YE SAFAR-E ZIYĀRATI (IRAQ: TRAVEL GUIDE, 2010).

FIGURE 24 - AN INTERIOR VIEW OF THE SHRINE OF AL-HURR. SOURCE: "AL-HURR AL-RIAHEE SHRINE", IMĀM HUSSAIN HOLY SHRINE, 22 JANUARY 2019, HTTPS://IMĀMHUSSAIN.ORG/ENGLISH/KARBALĀʾ/23929.

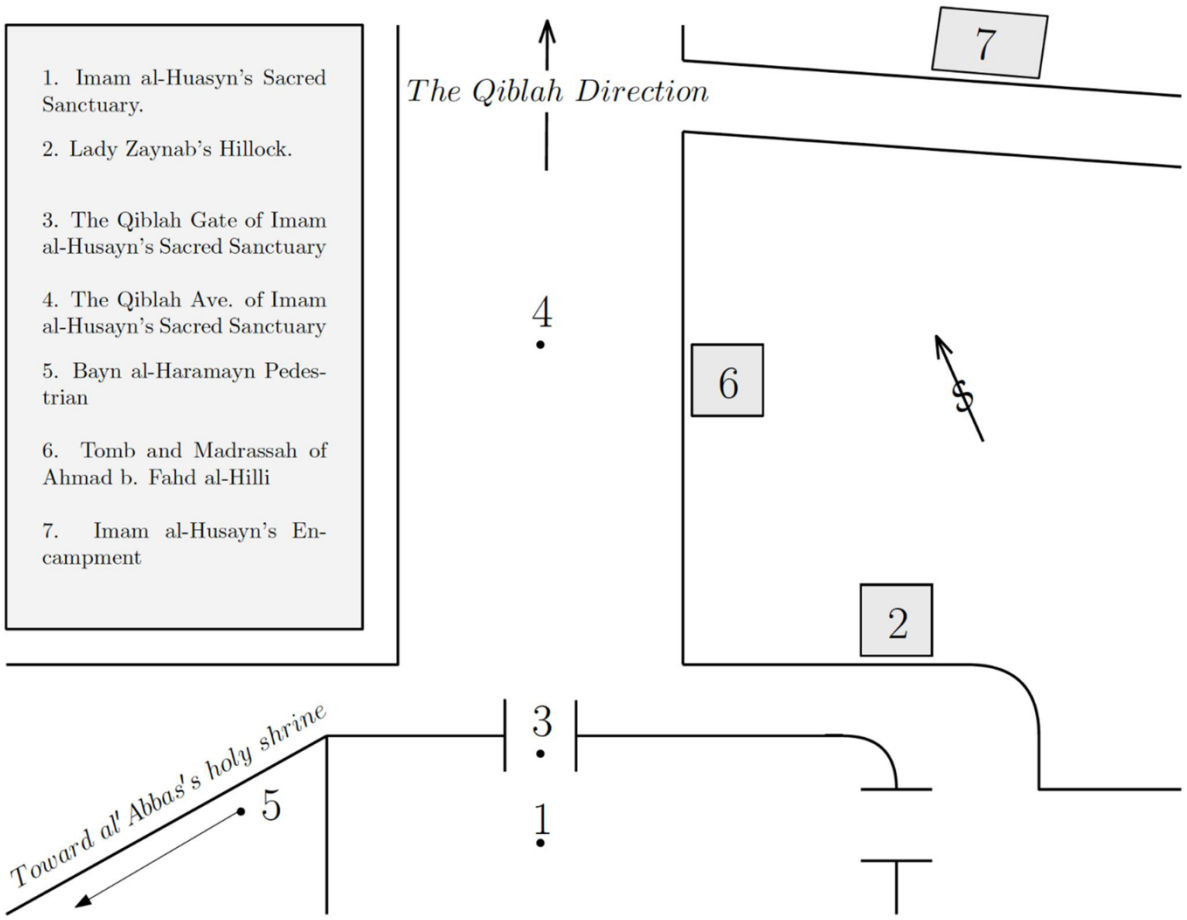

FIGURE 25 - IMĀM AL-ḤUSAYN'S SACRED SANCTUARY AND ITS ASSOCIATED PILGRIMAGE SITES AT KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: ORIGINAL GRAPHIC RENDERED FROM SKETCH PROVIDED BY MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI, 2021.

Spatiality is central to Karbalāʾs construction in world politics. The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage demonstrates the generative power of places and spaces in sustaining and reproducing collective Shīʿī identity.[779] Approaching world society through spatiality, Weinert writes:

> Cities represent amalgamations of stabilised relationships… Space assumes (social) meaning and signification not merely by virtue of their tangibility, but as a consequence of the actions and relationships that occur within them and the meanings ascribed to them. Spatiality captures our understanding of physical environments as 'horizons of intelligibility' that not merely orient actors'

[779] Massey notes: "Spatiality and entities such as "places" are products of our interactions". See Doreen Massey, "Space-Time, "Science" and the Relationship Between Physical Geography and Human Geography", *Transactions of the Institution of British Geographers* 24 (1999): 261-276.

> immediate senses of the here and now, but also represent possibilities of unfolding. Spatiality thus packages together individualised and collective ascriptions of meaning and significance to places, and relational processes that, by virtue of 'networks of relationships,' constitute spaces.[780]

The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage is a set of contingent spatial sites that express the collective consciousness of the Shīʿī community. In assemblage, these sites represent a spatial reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ, constructing Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics. Because they are historically contingent, these sites can be thought of as 'processes of becoming' wherein collective Shīʿī identity is constantly produced and reproduced.[781] Yeoh and Kong note: "place and history are closely intertwined in the rich texture of individual and social life. There is no history without place, and no place without history; to lose sight of one would be to lose sense of the other".[782] This underscores the Karbalāʾs broader significance as a generative reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ and collective Shīʿī identity.

Arguably, as individual believers collectively re-experience the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ, the Assemblage might be viewed as a source of unity for the Shīʿī community, which has witnessed political division, corruption and demoralisation. More to the point, the expansion of the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage serves as a reminder of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a collective past and memory capable of unifying the community's shared future. It reifies the enduring relevance

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[780] Matthew Weinert, "Grounding World Society: Spatiality, Cultural Heritage, and our World as Shared Geographies", *Review of International Studies* 43:3 (2017): 409-429, 414

[781] Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process", 287.

[782] Brenda Yeoh and Lily Kong, "The Notion of Place: In the Construction of History, Nostalgia and Heritage", in *Our Place in Time – Exploring Heritage and Memory in Singapore*, eds. Kwoh Kian-Woon et. al. (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1999), 132-152, 149.

of Karbalā in world politics as the "axis around which of history revolves for the Shīʿīs".[783] In this way, it reproduces Hobsbawm's 'invented tradition':

> A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where probably, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.[784]

In this way, the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage makes Karbalāʾ known to tourists as the spiritual capital of Shīʿīsm and also makes an authoritative claim to unity based on the shared collective consciousness of its followers. It recognises that persons can understand themselves and their social worlds with reference to religio-local spatial scales, national Iraqi spatial scales, and other scales at the same time.

This chapter highlights how Karbalāʾs religious geography and the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage generate collective Shīʿī identity in a multiplicity of ways. Karbalāʾ contains many sacred pilgrimage sites and spaces associated with the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his companions on ʿĀshūrāʾ. These include the shrines of Imām al-Ḥusayn and Abbas, along with supplementary sites like the Zaynab Hillock and the al-Hurr district. Together they form an Assemblage that materialises the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ through space. Spatiality and shared ritual practices create "communities of practice", stabilising relationships between adherents. The ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage blurs distinctions between tangible gravesites and intangible memories.

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[783] Aghaie, "Gender-coded Symbols and Public Religious Rituals in Post-Revolutionary Iran", 80.

[784] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983),1-14, 1.

Ephemeral places like Imām al-Ḥusayn's encampment site accrue meaning despite geographic ambiguity. Interactions between people, texts, and spaces sustain Karbalāʾs centrality.

Because they preserve and reproduce a living history of ʿĀshūrāʾ, Imām al-Ḥusayn's sanctuary, the Bayn al-Haramayn, Abbas' Maqam, Zaynab Hillock, Ḥusayn's Encampment, and the shrine of Al-Hurr – collectively substantiates how Karbalāʾs religious geography and the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage generate collective Shīʿī identity. As Shīʿas experience Karbalāʾs spaces through pilgrimage and poetry, their shared emotions and practices generate a collective consciousness. Even replicas authenticate the broader narrative. The assemblage binds followers collectively, to the pivotal events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Karbalāʾs religious geography and the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage concretise the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ into a lived spatial reality. Ritual activities within these loaded spaces allow collective remembrance of Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacrifice, reproducing a unified Shīʿī identity anchored to Karbalāʾ worldwide. The city's layout reflects and reinforces its role as the axis of Shīʿī history and collective identity.

Conclusion

Karbalāʾs religious-cultural landscape or "ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage" fosters collective Shīʿī identity through connected spaces. Collective Shīʿī identity and memory are tangibly represented by this assemblage of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces, while rituals contribute to the enhanced perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The nucleus and sacred core of Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ assemblage is the shrine and tomb of Imām al-Ḥusayn and ʿAli al-ʾAkbar. The sacred core is contained within a broader peripheral concentric sacred space of the shrine and holy sanctuary, containing several cultural objects and the collective tomb of ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. The sanctuary is one component of the assemblage linked by the sacralised Bayn al-Haramayn to the shrine

of Imām al-ʿAbbās. Connecting the assemblage is a constellation of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented ephemeral places, historical meeting spots and epiphenomenal shrines and mosques. Taken together, one can argue, this religious spatial assemblage fosters collective Shīʿī identity.

This chapter examined how Karbalāʾs cultural landscape reproduces collective Shīʿī identity based on spots and spaces relevant to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. The first section situated Karbalāʾs geo-cultural significance in Shīʿīsm through the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Next, this section discussed how Karbalāʾs sacred spaces construct the city as a focal point of transnational Shīʿī pilgrimage. Emphasising the exceptional position of Karbalāʾs sacred sanctuary, the section outlined the significance of Infallibility in Shīʿīsm as a metric for measuring the relative status of mosques and shrines, elevating the position of Karbalāʾ. The second section anatomised Karbalāʾs major and minor pilgrimage places and spaces constituting the ʿĀshūrāʾ assemblage. This involved depicting concentric and other peripheral sacred places and spaces within Imām al-Ḥusayn's holy sanctuary and illustrating its associated pilgrimage sequences. The third section highlighted how the entire city and its environs represent a broader locus of pilgrimage and collective Shīʿī identity. This brought attention to the nature of sacralised spaces such as the Bayn al-Haramayn. The final section depicted several spaces of prescribed ritual in and around Karbalāʾ, geographically relevant to the historical events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Chapter Six: ʿĀshūrāʾ as A Master Narrative of Collective Identity

> By being part of the sacred drama, nature itself becomes sacred. This sacralization of nature may be seen symbolically in the sanctity of the days of Muharram, the sacralization of time, and of Karbalāʾ, the sacralization of space. – Mahmoud Ayoub.[785]

Having established how Karbalāʾs cultural landscape reproduces collective Shīʿī identity, this chapters outlines how space, textual cosmologies, rituals and objects reproduce collective identity through ʿĀshūrāʾ. The first section highlights how the events that took place in 61 AH/ 680 AD at Karbalāʾ are constructed as a master martyrdom narrative in Shīʿīsm. The second section examines existing conceptions of the so-called Karbalāʾ Paradigm and introduces Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus'.[786] It outlines how its layers and components reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. The chapter concludes by contemplating the place and personality of Imām al-Ḥusayn in world history, as a way of demonstrating how Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics. Ultimately, this chapter brings attention to how Karbalāʾ reproduces collective identity not only through space, but also through Muharram rituals, pilgrimage, prayer recitation, poetic lamentations, and stories.

In the context of the 9th and 10th-century Islamic world, Antrim writes, "The discourse of place includes works that have been classified separately as world and regional geographies, literary anthologies, topographical histories, religious treatises, travelogues and poems".[787] Antrim uses this framework to describe the unique nature of 'extratextual performances' in

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[785] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 147.

[786] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 44.

[787] Antrim, *Routes & Realms*, 3.

cities through cognitive, oral and physical acts "prompted by a text".[788] Karbalāʾ exemplifies this city-specific urban phenomenon of "extratextual performance" through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented performative rituals, including as pilgrimage, poetry, and using ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented objects during ritual activities. Significantly, each of these extratextual aspects are prompted by intertextual ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented texts.[789]

Intertextuality is central to Karbalāʾ as the focal point of Shīʿī narratives and hagiography relating to the martyrdom of Imām-al-Ḥusayn. This is evident in the multiplicity of literary discourses inspired by the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, both written and oral, that interact with each other.[790] Throughout the history of Islam, the city has been portrayed as the spiritual capital of Shīʿīsm by religious intellectuals and political leaders alike. These detailed discourses of place, primarily relating to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ, construct Karbalāʾ as an authoritative and attractive expression of collective identity through the ritualised power of place. This transnational collective identity is reproduced through literary anthologies, topographical histories, travelogues, and poetic accounts associated with the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative.[791]

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[788] *Ibid*.

[789] These ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and texts are further elaborated in section three of this chapter as sources of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'.

[790] Noteworthy literary sources include M. Al-Khwārazmī, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn,* ed. M. al-Samāwi (Qom, n.p. 2007); A.-J, Al-Kiliddār, *Ta'rikh Karbalā wa Hāir al-Ḥusayn 'Alayh al-Salām* (Qom: n.p., 1998); Sayyid ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mūsāwi al-Muqarram, *Maqtal al-Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Al-Kharsan Foundation for Publications, 1979); Bāqir Sharīf al-Qarashī, *The Life of Imām Hussain*, trans. A.H Rizvi (Qom: Anasariyan Publications, 2007); Ahmad Al-Saberi al-Hamadani, *Adab al-Ḥusayn wa Himsatub*, 3rd ed. (Qom: Anasariyan Publications, 1994); Muḥammad Javad al-Tabasī, *al-Maqtal al-Husani al-Ma'thür*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: al-Samiʿ Publications, 2007); J. b. M. Ibn Qūlawayh al-Qummī, *Kamil al-Zīyārāt*, trans. Sayyid Mohsen al-Ḥusayni al Milani (Miami: Johnson Publishing Company, 2008).

[791] For a useful introduction to Shīʿīte anthology, see Allamah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *A Shiite Anthology*, trans. William C. Chittick (Qom: Ansariyan Publications, 1980).

The collective identity pivot discussed in Chapter Two is the most salient pivot in Karbalāʾ. Building on Antrim's 'discourse of place', this chapter offers an understanding that expands on Fischer's 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' by introducing elements of what Fakhr-Rohani terms the 'Ḥusayni impetus'.[792] Together, these features complete a recursive cycle where spaces and rituals related to ʿĀshūrāʾ reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. These phenomena represent temporal junctures where textually inspired poetic rituals and prescribed deeds, enhance the perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a mnemonic for behaviour and temporality.[793] Having established the structure and theoretical foundation of this chapter, it is important to clarify why the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ cannot be accurately described as a tragedy.

Western Tragedy and the Martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn

In the Shīʿī community, the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn is seen as "a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves".[794] However, Imām al-Ḥusayn's death is sometimes described as the 'ʿĀshūrāʾ tragedy' or the 'Karbalāʾ tragedy'.[795] Scholars and writers are correct in describing many of the events leading up to and on ʿĀshūrāʾ as objectively tragic. Framing the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a tragedy is misleading

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[792] Antrim, *Routes & Realms*; Fischer, *Iran*, 27.

[793] For exegeses on this topic, see Chelkowski, *Taʿziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran*; David Pinault, *The Shiʿites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); David Pinault, *Horse of Karbalāʾ: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York, Palgrave, 2001); Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*; Peter J. Chelkowski, *Eternal Performance: Taʾziyeh and Other Shiʿite Rituals* (New York: Seagull, 2010).

[794] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 141.

[795] A noteworthy example is Joseph Héliodore Garcin de Tassy, "The Tragedy of Karbalāʾ", in *Muslim Festivals in India and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Muḥammad Waseem (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 41-56.

because it does not contain the "moral incoherence" central to conceptions of tragedy in Western political philosophy.[796] Lu writes, "Tragedies of character highlight aspects of human ignorance, character defects or other types of human fallibility that produce disproportionate catastrophe".[797] This militates against the story of Imām al-Ḥusayn because in Shīʿīsm he was an Infallible personality and his martyrdom was divinely preordained. Shīʿī scholars argue that Imām al-Ḥusayn anticipated and wilfully chose to be martyred for the preservation of the umma.[798] In the days leading up to ʿĀshūrāʾ, in a speech to the Kufans, Imām al-Ḥusayn is quoted as declaring, "I am moving towards death, and death is not unprestigious for a freeman".[799]

In Shīʿī Islam, the event of ʿĀshūrāʾ is not seen as a mistake, but as a demonstration of the pre-destined and wilful martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn. In this sense, the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative is not viewed as a tragedy because it was not a result of an accidental event or some error of judgement or defect of character, but rather was preordained. This event is seen as a sacrifice for the sake of God and for the pursuit of justice and truth.[800] Unlike Western tragedies, a martyr in Shīʿīsm willingly chooses their path with full knowledge and determination.[801] The goal of a martyr is different from that of the protagonist of a Shakespearean tragedy, it should be noted, as a martyr aims to defend their religion and the

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[796] Catherine Lu, "Tragedies and International Relations" in *Tragedy and International Relations*, eds. Toni Erskine and Richard Ned Lebow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 158-172, 159.

[797] *Ibid*, 162-163.

[798] Fakhr-Rohani, *From Medina to Karbalāʾ*; Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 121-124.

[799] *Ibid*, 134.

[800] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 141.

[801] See Wayne C. Booth, "Macbeth as a Tragic Hero", *The Journal of General Education* 6:1 (1951): 17-25; Miriam Joseph, ""Hamlet," a Christian Tragedy", *Studies in Philology* 59:2 (1962): 119-140.

truth, while characters such as Macbeth or Hamlet tend to suffer for the pursuit of worldly or venal desires.[802]

Oriental portrayals of Islam have a significant impact on the historically distorted accounts of the Karbalāʾ event. This can be attributed to two main factors: 1) the subjectification and objectification of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom event. 2) The marginalised position of post-colonial intellectuals in effectively translating, constructing and disseminating past works into their purest, most accurate historical and narrative forms. Several pro-Ummayad accounts of early Sunnī-Shīʿa divide were amplified by orientalist historians, leading to the generally monolithic treatment of Islam in early Western scholarship.

The first edition of Belgian priest Henri Lammens's Encyclopaedia of Islam provided a pro-Ummayad account which glorified Yazid and described Imām al-Ḥusayn as "playing none of the heroic parts so fondly described by the Shiis".[803] Kamal Salibi critically redressed Lammens' pro-Yazid partiality and description of the ʿĀshūrāʾ event.[804] Fakhr-Rohani uncovers further evidence of Lammens' oriental distortion and polemic portrayal of Imām al-Ḥusayn and the ʿĀshūrāʾ Martyrs. In Islam: Beliefs and Institutions, Lammens writes, "The fall of Husain, a quite mediocre person, excites the Shīʿas to the point of delirium".[805] Lammens

[802] *Ibid*, 150.

[803] Henri Lammens, *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* vol.3 (Leiden: 1913-1936), 339.

[804] Kamal Salibi, "Islam and Syria in the Writings of Henri Lammens", in *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 330-342.

[805] Henri Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, trans. Sir E. Denison Ross (London: Methuen, 1929), 4.

also described the ʿĀshūrāʾ event as "the mad escapade of Kerbelā".[806] These examples illustrate how colonial history marginalised and objectified Shīʿī Islam through the historical bias, prejudicial portrayals of ʿĀshūrāʾs and denigration of Imām al-Ḥusayn's personality. Ultimately, oriental history denied the significance of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a pivot in the emergence of collective Shīʿī identity within Islam's still misunderstood early Sunnī-Shīʿa divide. In Shīʿī Islam, ʿĀshūrāʾ is considered an essential event for the salvation of humanity. Another significant occurrence central to the beliefs of Shīʿīsm is the event of al-Ghadir or Ghadir Khumm.

The Event of Ghadir Khumm and Allama Amini

The event of Ghadir Khumm, which occurred on March 19, 620 CE, is important in Shīʿīsm as it strengthens the power of the Karbalāʾ narrative as a prelude to ʿĀshūrāʾ.[807] According to Shīʿī belief, on this day the Prophet Muḥammad, at the direct command of Allah, appointed and announced Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as his successor and legatee.[808] The Prophet is quoted as declaring: "For whomsoever I am his Leader (*mawlā*), this ʿAlī is his Leader (*mawlā*). O Allah! May You love those who love him and be hostile to those who are hostile to him".[809] The use of *mawlā* is significant because of its connotation to *wilaya* which can be thought of

[806] *Ibid*. Quoted in Muhammad-reza Fakhr-Rohani, *Islamic Martyrdom Narratives (Maqtals)*, unpublished manuscript provided by author, 196.

[807] See Kishwar Rizvi, *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 101.

[808] In this context, "Legatee" denotes ʿAlī's inheritance of leadership of the *umma* as Muḥammad's legacy. See, Fakhr-Rohani, *Devoted to the Truth*, 59.

[809] *Ibid*.

as a form of temporal authority or viceregency on earth.[810] Sunnīs contest the meaning of Ghadir Khumm, reasoning that the Prophet would have announced Ali's leadership in a more declarative way. Shīʿīsm recognises Ghadir Khumm as the Prophet's official introduction and nomination of Imām ʿAlī as his successor. It is considered a key moment in the history of Sunnī-Shīʿa dynamics and the emergence of collective transnational Shīʿī identity. Although contested, Ghadir Khumm enhances the rationality of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative and accentuates the coherence of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a master narrative.[811]

Allami Amini's account of the historic event of Ghadir Khumm is central to understanding the rationality of the Karbalāʾ master narrative.[812] Amini sought to legitimise the event of Ghadir Khumm, by citing over 100,000 sources, including primary accounts, ḥadīths, reports and poetry.[813] In the perspective of the Shīʿī, Amini defended the event by responding to critics such as Sayyid Rashid Rida and Ibn Taymīyyah. For his part, Ibn Taymīyyah directed accusations towards the Ahl al-Bayt and its followers. He aimed his criticism at Imām ʿAlī and the Shīʿī belief in the legitimacy of the descendants of the Prophet, comparing it to the Jewish idea that only the descendants of King David are entitled to rule.[814] Allama Amini's magnum

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[810] Mohammad Sagha, "Al-Gadir: The Fountainhead of Shiʿism", *Visions - Harvard Divinity School*, 20 August 2019, https://shiablog.hds.harvard.edu/blog/al-ghadir-fountainhead-shi'ism.

[811] Iran's founding supreme leader Imām Khomeini referred Ghadir Khumm as the "completion of the religion, the perfection of God's greatest bounty". See "Imām Khomeini Defined Ghadir as Most Magnificent Feast", *Imām-Khomeini.ir*, 19 August 2019, http://en.imām-khomeini.ir/en/n27439/Imām-Khomeini-defined-Ghadir-as-most-magnificent-feast.

[812] For examples of primary Shīʿī theological affirmations of Ghadir Khumm, see Ḥasan b. Thabit, *Diwan of Hassan Ibn Thabit*, eds. Walid N. ʿArafat. E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series. 2 vols. (London: Luzac, 1971); Sulaym b. Qays, *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilali,* vol. 2, ed. Shaykh Mohamed Bāqiral-Ansari Qom, Iran: Nashr al-Hādī, 1994); al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, vol 2, ed. Wilferd Madelung (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2003).

[813] Fakhr-Rohani, *Devoted to the Truth*, 96.

[814] Ibn Taymīyyah, *Minhāj al-sunnah*. Quoted in Fakhr-Rohani, *Devoted to the Truth*, 92.

opus, Al-Ghadir, was revised and edited twice in Amini's lifetime. It involved engagement with a broad range of Sunnī sources, Qur'ānic commentaries, ḥadīths, poetical anthologies and historiographies.[815] Al-Ghadir represents a central piece of Shīʿī literature which rebukes objections to the leadership of Imām ʿAlī. By responding to critiques such as Rashid Rida and Ibn Taymīyyah, Amini engaged in debates within the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide which fostered legitimacy through historical, literary and doctrinal jurisprudence, rather than legitimacy through political jurisprudence.[816] Having established the importance of this event as a precursor to ʿĀshūrāʾ, the following section discusses how the Karbalāʾ narrative represents a master narrative of collective identity.

The Karbalāʾ Martyrdom Narrative: A Master Narrative of Collective Shīʿī Identity

The Karbalāʾ narrative is central to collective Shīʿī identity. This section outlines how the Battle of Karbalāʾ in 61 AH/ 680 CE – and its themes of justice, nobility and sacrifice – serve as a master narrative in Shīʿīsm. The structure of this martyrdom narrative is based on an axiomatic dualistic struggle between good and evil. After the Prophet Muḥammad died in 10 AH/ 632 CE, the umma were divided over leadership between Abū Bakr (d. 634 CE) and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE). The minority supporting ʿAlī argued that authority and leadership of the umma should remain within the Ahl al-Bayt (The Infallible People of the Prophet's House). Supporters of Abū Bakr argued leadership of the umma should be based on majority

[815] Fakhr-Rohani, *Devoted to the Truth*, 96.

[816] Rashid Rida and Ibn Taymīyyah were divisively polemical adherents of Salafīsm, a conservative strand of Sunni Islam. For more on both figures and their position in Islam, See Raihan Ismail, *Rethinking Salafism: The Transnational Networks of Salafi 'Ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 71-86.

opinion.[817] The Karbalāʾ story became a key source of collective identity, capable of inspiring a master narrative in Shīʿīsm.

Master narratives are useful for understanding how collective identity develops through collective memories, attitudes and psychological performativity.[818] Aghaie confirms that while the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative centres on Imām al-Ḥusayn, it is also a text whose "narrative structure is a chain of accounts of Prophets and Imāms (beginning with Adam and ending with the in-occultation Twelfth Imām), all of whom had suffered injustice and oppression".[819] For this reason, the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative functions as a master narrative which reproduces collective Shīʿī identify based on the broader themes of nobility, sacrifice and resistance to oppression as evident in the story of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans in Karbalāʾ.

Syed and McLean define master narratives as "culturally shared stories that tell us about a given culture and provide guidance for how to be a 'good' member of a culture; they are part

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[817] For a comprehensive study of early Islamic history and the issue of leadership of the *umma* after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, see Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: a Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); For a Shīʿīte jurisprudential claim to Ali's rightful succession, see Shiblī N'umānī, *al-Fārūq* [the life of Umar the Great: the second caliph of Islam], trans. Mawlana Zafar 'Ali Khān (Lahore: Shaykh Barkat 'Ali, 1967) 82-87; For a Sunni jurisprudential assertion to Abu Bakr's rightful succession, see Kuhda Bukhsh, *The Orient Under the Caliphs* (New Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delli, 1983), 3.

[818] The literature on narratives and master narratives is vast. See for instance Phillip Hammack, "Narrative and the Politics of Meaning", *Narrative Inquiry* 21:2 (January 2011): 311-318; Phillip Hammack and Andrew Pilecki, "Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Political Psychology", *Political Psychology* 33:1 (December 2011): 75-103; Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, "Of Storytellers and Master Narratives: Modernity, Memory, and History in Fascist Italy", *Social Science History* 22:4 (Winter 1998): 415-444; Ronald G. Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations", *The Journal of Modern History* 73:4 (December 2001): 862-896; Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Roger C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story: Narrative and Intelligence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

[819] Aghaie, "The Karbalāʾ Narrative: Shīʿī Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s", 154.

of the structure of society".[820] Karbalāʾs cultural landscape encourages membership of Shīʿī culture which promotes pious devotion and emulation of Imām al-Ḥusayn. In this way, the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative also serves as source of collective Shīʿī identity. Master narratives contain distinct 'story forms'.[821] These are standard patterns on which stories may be based, defining the typical characters, their actions, and sequences of events in a story.[822] Story forms refer to divergence of occurrence in desired outcomes or "end state".[823] When desired outcomes do not occur in the story form, they are framed symbolically as a necessary sacrifice in the struggle between good and evil.[824] One way of viewing the Karbalāʾ narrative is through the archetypal 'hero's journey'. As mentioned earlier, Inloes shows how Imām al-Ḥusayn's story replicates the hero's journey structure. The utility of this story as a universal and archetypal master narrative is often utilised through the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'.

Beyond The Karbalāʾ Paradigm

The 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' has become a popular way of conceptualising Muharram rituals in social scientific scholarship. As noted in Chapter Three, Fischer coined the phrase 'Karbalāʾ

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[820] Moin Syed, and Kate C. McLean, "Personal, Master, and Alternative Narratives: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Identity Development in Context", *Human Development* 58 (2015): 318-349, 319. This notion is developed further in Moin Syed, Monisha Pasupathi and Kate C. McLean "Master Narratives, Ethics and Morality", in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Development: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Lene Arnett Jensen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 500-515.

[821] Paul A. Roth, "How Narratives Explain", *Social Research* 56:2 (Summer, 1989): 449-478.

[822] See Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982).

[823] For narrative "end states" and "desired outcomes", see Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135:1 (August 2007): 1-15.

[824] For a useful source, relevant to this symbolic framing of good and evil, see Michael Ranta, "(Re-Creating Order: Narrativity and Implied World Views in Pictures", *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 5 (2013): 1-30.

Paradigm' as providing "models for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live".[825] The term has been used to describe a variety of phenomena ranging from the martyrdom's narrational utilisation, various dramatisations, and also as a way of differentiating Shīʿī rituals or as some scholars describe it, "modes of piety".[826]

As noted in Chapter Three, Szanto questioned the dichotomous framings of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm, arguing that it "depoliticizes salvation and desacralizes revolution".[827] She supports this argument by showing how modes of piety can be both revolutionary and salvific, as demonstrated through the concepts of *athara* (tradition) and *thara* (revolution). As both concepts materialise during mourning rituals and reflect a duality of mind and body through theoretical dogma and practical piety, they are affectively complementary. This thesis builds on Szanto's focus on affect rather than political effectiveness by highlighting how ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented texts, spaces and ritual reproduces collective Shīʿī identity in a differentiated but associated way. It utilises Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus' as another way of understanding the psychic, attitudinal, and devotional aspects of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm beyond dichotomous and politicised conceptions. This analytical narrative provides a wider understanding of collective Shīʿī identity and Karbalāʾ in IR.

The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' as Collective Shīʿī Identity

> The manifestation of sorrow and grief by actually weeping for the Holy Family of Muḥammad needs an impetus. One strong aid for creating the proper atmosphere of sorrow has been to relate one or

[825] Fischer, *Iran*, 21.

[826] Deeb, "Living ʿĀshūrāʾ in Lebanon"; Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*; Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*.

[827] Szanto, "Beyond the Karbala Paradigm", 14.

> more of the many traditions attributed to the imāms, enjoining their followers to lament Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the sufferings of other members of his family. By emphasising one or several aspects of the tragedy of Karbalā, the devotees are reminded of the object of sorrow. Soon special memorial services (the taʿziyīyah majlis) developed, giving this religio-political phenomenon a rich ritualistic character. – Mahmoud Ayoub.[828]

Ayoub's reference to an 'impetus' for sorrow in lamentations highlights an important aspect of how Shīʿī rituals utilise the Karbalāʾ narrative. The universality of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative can be seen as reproducing and reinforcing a form Ḥusayni-inspired collective identity. In 2019, Fakhr-Rohani coined the term 'Ḥusayni impetus', defining it as:

> The motivation that devout people sense to discharge their religio-moral duty toward Imām al-Ḥusayn in a variety of ways, e.g., pitching a temporary tent for holding commemorative sessions, spending their properties in this way, composing poems and marthiyahs, designing posters, serving tea, or cleaning a mosque or Ḥusayniyah for such memorial purposes.[829]

The 'Ḥusayni impetus' refers to a distinct collective identity based on the values and virtues of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans. This Karbalāʾ master narrative and Imām al-Ḥusayn's position as the most significant martyr in Shīʿīsm inspire this impetus. Those who subscribe to the religio-moral duties embedded in the Karbalāʾ narrative identify with the narrative's appeal for freedom from tyranny, liberty, peace and unity. The 'Ḥusayni impetus' is expressed in multiple ways. These elements include books, stories, historiographies, icons, poetical anthologies, pilgrimage, space, and an array of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals and practices. As Massey notes: "our beings, our identities, are constituted in and through… Practices of interaction. Identities are forged in and through relations… In consequence they are not rooted

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[828] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 151.

[829] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 44.

or static, but mutable ongoing productions".[830] The following section outlines components of these 'mutable ongoing productions' and how they collectively reinforce an ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented collective identity.

Components of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'

The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' can be divided into five ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented categories: Spaces, textual sources, performative sources, rituals, and objects.[831] These five components are crucial to both the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative and the reproduction of collective transnational Shīʿī identity. Textual sources are helpful in making sense of contemporaneous events. Another essential factor of textual sources is their intertextuality. As outlined earlier in this chapter, intertextuality refers to the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts, which reinforce or redefine original or initial texts. All textual sources revolve around motifs embedded in the Karbalāʾ narrative. How these texts relate to the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, they tend to fall into the taxonomy of 'ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented' literature. Several stylistic and compositional techniques may be employed to convey the desired meaning of the text. Figure 26 illustrates the mutual constitution of these sources and why textual sources cannot be conceptualised in isolation from the other four components.

[830] Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility", *Geografiska Annaler: Series B Human Geography* 86:1 (2004): 5-18, 5.

[831] Figure 26.

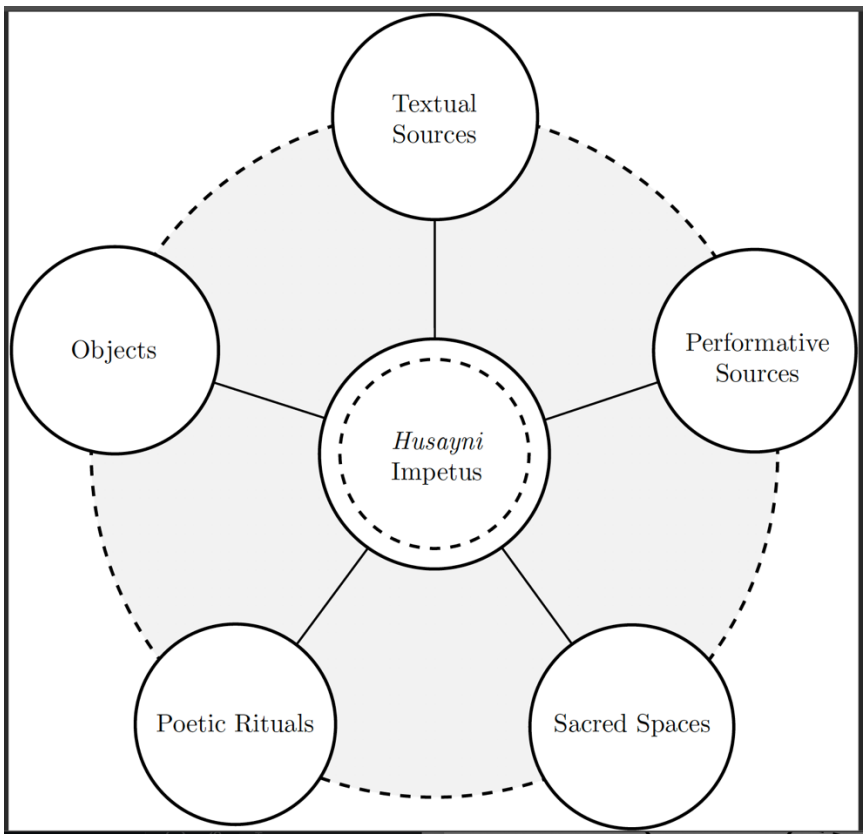

FIGURE 26 - SOURCES OF THE 'ḤUSAYNI IMPETUS' SOURCE: ORIGINAL SOURCE. GRAPHIC ADAPTED FROM ELEMENTS OF FAKHR-ROHANI'S 'ḤUSAYNI IMPETUS'.

Textual Sources: ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented Literature

Textual sources grounded in Islamic jurisprudence authoritatively affirm and encourage pilgrimage and ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals. Mozaffari suggests that Ḥusayn's "reported sermons during the Battle of Karbala constitute the first textual references in a Shiʿi Collective Imagination and the model for *Moharram* memorial services".[832] Various Hadiths prescribe these rituals, such as *zīyārat*. Ḥadīth-based *zīyārat*-texts (pilgrimage texts) vary in length and form, from elaborate narrative compositions to short poetic works on *zīyārat*. These texts are unique in that they are issued by any of the Infallible Imāms favouring another Imām. Ḥadīth-

[832] Mozaffari, *Forming a National identity in Iran*, 72.

based *zīyārat* texts authorise the importance of pilgrimage based on rhetorical content issued by the Infallible Imāms. Several such texts relating to Imām al-Ḥusayn and his companions were issued after the ʿĀshūrāʾ event. Fakhr-Rohani notes: "The fifth Infallible Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir and the sixth Infallible Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq issued the largest number of ḥadīth-based *zīyārat*-texts in favor of Imām al-Ḥusayn".[833] *Zīyārat*-texts have intertextual value for multiple reasons. First, these texts are composed in relation to other texts, and encourage, or emphasise the centrality of pilgrimage. Second, they clarify issues of Shīʿī theology and fundamental creeds such as testification of the Divine Unicity and the Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the Infallible Imāmate of the Imāms.[834] Finally, they provide a guide for pilgrims to comprehend the significance of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, particularly the universally praiseworthy characteristics of Imām al-Ḥusayn.

Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nūrī (d.1902) was a prominent scholar who studied under two influential figures in 20th century Shīʿīsm: Murtada Anṣārī, the key proponent of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and Mirza Shirāzī, the leader of the 1890 Tobacco protest. Nuri's most famous work is *Mustadrak al-wasa'l* – a supplementation of Al-Hurr al-ʿAmili's (d. 1693) *Wasa'il al-Shia*. *Mustadrak al-wasa'l* contains over 23,000 ḥadīths that were not cited in al-ʿAmili's work. In it, Nuri emphasises the importance of ʿĀshūrāʾ several times, quoting Imām Ṣādiq as stating "The sky had cried for forty days over (the martyrdom of) Husain (A.S.)".[835] He also noted the importance of reciting

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[833] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 22.

[834] Generally speaking, "unicity" refers to the doctrine of the Imāmate in Twelver Shīʿīsm. Specifically, it refers to oneness of God (*tawhid*) in addition to the divinity of the Eleven Imāms. In Shīʿī theology, this topic typically involves both ḥadīth reporting with analytical elements of philosophical mysticism regarding the Imāmate. See for instance, Jawād b. 'Abbās Karbalā'i, *al-Anwār al-sāti'ah fi sharh ziyārat al-jami'ah* (Tehran: Manshurat A'lami, 1950).

[835] Mirza Ḥusayn Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* (Najaf: Mu'assisa Al al-Bayt li ihya'al-Turath, 1987), 391.

poems during Muharram, quoting Imām Reza who told the poet Debil: "I desire that you recite for me poetry, for surely these days (of the month of Muharram) are days of grief and sorrow, which have passed over us".[836] Several non-Ḥadīth based texts such as marthiyahs are also noteworthy sources of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented collective identity.

Marthiyahs (Lamentation poetry)

Roughly translating to "elegy" in English, a marthiyah/ marsiyah – which is a non-Arabic pronunciation of the word *marthīyah* is a crucial ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented textual source which takes the form of a mourning dirge. In Shīʿī culture and tradition, a *marthīyah* is a poetic expression of grief or lamentation.[837] The Infallible Imāms encouraged poets to compose and recite such works on the martyrdom of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Imām Jaʿfar al-Sādiq is quoted as stating: "He who recites poetry about Ḥusayn, causing fifty persons to weep and weeps himself, will have a place in paradise".[838] Describing their contemporaneous relevance, Fahkr-Rohani notes,

> In the ancient Arabic culture, marthiyahs contain hints as to taking revenge for the slain dignitary. In case the deceased or slain personality was a political activist, the marthiyahs composed in his commemoration have political overtones, too.[839]

These elegies are intentionally emotional and individualised as they reflect the approach of the poet. They can take on a form of direct religio-political speech, because the poet can "express religious, cultural and social ideas and sentiments, not only of his heart and mind, but also of

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[836] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 386.

[837] *Ibid*, 62.

[838] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 159.

[839] *Ibid*.

the collective soul of the people".[840] This process involves transforming live and fleeting communication into a symbolic representation of faith. The tradition of *marthīyah* composition and circulation is transnational, spanning multiple Shīʿīte dynasties and resulting in an array of sub-genres in Persian, Turkish and Urdu.[841] The transnational nature of this tradition led to an organic overlap with anthologies, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī's *al-Muntakhab*. This is an anthology of Arabic poems, *marthīyah*, and fragments of history, emphasising the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī al-Najafī (d. 1674), a renowned Shīʿīte cleric and man of letters, developed this intertextual method.[842]

Another influential ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented poet was Muhtasham Kāshāni (d.1587). Kāshāni was a prolific Persian *marthīyah* composer during the Safavid dynasty. Portions of his work are inscribed as devotional decorations on the walls of mosques, *Ḥusayniyahs* and holy shrines.[843] Some of his Persian marthiyahs were inscribed on the inner walls of Imām al- Ḥusayn's holy shrine, particularly around the metal grating of Imām al-Ḥusayn.[844] However, they were later removed.[845] Emphasising Kāshānī's influence on the development of *marthīyah* composition,

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[840] *Ibid*.

[841] Danielle Ross highlights the prominence of *marthiyahs* in Russia's Volga-Ural region in the late imperial period (1970s-1917). See Danielle Ross, "The Promiscuous Life of a Genre for the Dead: The Marthiya as an Instrument of Community Construction Muslim Russia", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 64 (2021): 343-376; Boivin discusses the evolution of marṡiyas literature in Lucknow and Hyderabad during the Awadh state of India. See Michel Boivin, "Sufism and Shi'ism in South Asia: Shahādat and the Evidence of the Sindhi *Marthiya*", in *Shiʿi Islam and Sufism Classical Views and Modern Perspectives*, eds. Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 225-254.

[842] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 70.

[843] interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 11 March 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[844] For a comprehensive account of the emergence and development of Shīʿī rituals during the Safavid period, see Jean Calmard, "Shīʿī Rituals and Power II. The Consolidation of Safavid Shīʿīsm: Folklore and Popular Religion", in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 141-144.

[845] interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 11 March 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

Fakhr-Rohani wrote, "Many poets have either composed *marthīyahs* in the same meter in which he had composed his famous *marthīyah* or appropriated lines of his *marthīyah* into their own".[846] This leads the discussion on textual sources of the Ḥusayni impetus to the important genre of martyrdom narratives or *maqātil* literature.

Maqātil (Martyrdom narrative)

The Arabic word *maqtal* means "place of killing or murder". In the middle of the 8th century, *maqātil* literature emerged as a distinct genre popular in Shīʿīsm and in Islam more generally.[847] Several Ḥusayni-maqtals have been composed in remembrance of Imām al-Ḥusayn and his companions. Guenther examined the evolution of the *maqātil* genre which started through oral transmission during private Shīʿīte lectures in the late 7th century. Written *maqtal* compilation became more common around the middle of the 8th century. Perkins divides Ḥusayni *maqātil* literature into four categories: (1) early accounts, (2) late ʿAbbāsid martyrologies, (3) Safavid era hagiographies, and (4) contemporary *maqtatil*.[848] Because *maqtals* combine information from previous accounts with new information, they are inherently intertextual. For this reason, they can have several authors and contain information from a variety of sources, contributing to the continuation of a textually sustained collective identity.[849]

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[846] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 69.

[847] *Maqātil* is the plural of *maqtal*. See, for instance, Khalid Sindawi, "The Image of Ḥusayn Ibn 'Alī in "Maqātil" Literature", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 20/21 (2002-2003): 79-104; Günther, "Maqtātil literature in Medieval Islam".

[848] Perkins, "The Thirst, and the Sun, and the Bleeding", 42-43.

[849] The enduring salience of *Maqātil* literature and its productive power in reproducing collective identity is reminiscent of Anderson's emphasis on print media in *Imagined Communities*. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

Famous *maqtal* composers include Hishām ibn al-Kalbī (d.819), Al-Wāqidī (d.823) and al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022).[850] Patricia Crone uses al-Wāqidī as an example of how historical accounts gain more detail as they are passed on. She writes: "if one storyteller should happen to mention a raid, the next storyteller would know the date of this raid, while the third would know everything that an audience might wish to hear about".[851] Therefore, *maqtals* were a crucial tool for collective memory in the early days of the Sunnī-Shīʿa split, and Ḥusayni *maqtals* evolved into a core device of collective Shīʿī identity.

Ḥusayni *maqtals* are an important part of Shīʿī ritual. According to Fakhr-Rohani, "The culmination and various sub-genres of the Ḥusayni *maqtal* can be found mainly in Shiite communities".[852] To effectively communicate maqtals, several roles are required. The first role is that of the *maqtal*-author, who recounts and develops the *maqtals*, drawing on classic sources typically relating to Imām al-Ḥusayn and other ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. The second role is the *maqtal*-chronicler, who also composes *maqtals* based on detailed classical historical accounts. The third and equally important is that of the *maqtal*-reciter, who recites and preaches maqtals in a way that effectively conveys themes of grief and lamentation to the audience. Giving weight this role, Fakhr-Rohani writes,

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[850] Guenther, "Maqtātil literature in Medieval Islam".

[851] Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 223.

[852] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 61.

> It is an honor to be a (professional) maqtal reciter because through practicing such a religious profession people come to learn more about Imām al-Ḥusayn, his character, aims, and teachings as well as various aspects of the ʿĀshūrāʾ episode.[853]

One important intertextual *maqtal* is *Maqātil al-ṭālibīyyīn*, written by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d.967).[854] This piece of work takes the form of a collective *maqtal* involving the descendants of Abū Ṭālib, the father of Imām ʿAlī and uncle to the Prophet Muḥammad. The *maqtal* addresses the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative, with specific emphasis on Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans. Another important *maqtal* is Sayyid Mushin al-Amīn's (d.1952) *Durr al-naḍīd fī marāthī al-sibṭ al-shahīd*. In this anthology, al-Amīn memorialises the ʿĀshūrāʾ event by compiling and editing various sources. The significance of these texts is amplified when considered collectively and in the context of the hundreds of thousands of maqtals composed intertextually in light of one another. *Zīyārat*-texts and maqtals give meaning to ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and enhance the perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ through pilgrimage and ritual. The emphasis on ʿĀshūrāʾ in Ḥusayni-*maqtals* reinforces the significance of place in Karbalāʾ and other sacred spaces.

Spaces: ʿĀshūrāʾ-Oriented Sacred Spaces

> In myth and ritual, time and space are treated as loci of the sacred. – Ayoub.[855]

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[853] *Ibid*, 62.

[854] *Ibid*.

[855] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 188.

The significance of sacralised and poetically ritualised spaces in Karbalāʾ is rooted in their ability to reproduce collective transnational Shīʿī identity. These spaces can be divided into two sub-categories: those located in Karbalāʾ and those located outside Karbalāʾ.[856] Within Karbalāʾ, spaces such as the two shrines, and other in-town sacralised spaces such as the Bayn al-Haramayn, Ḥusayn's encampment and the Zaynab Hillock reproduce collective Shīʿī identity.[857] Outside of Karbalāʾ, ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces that also reproduce collective Shīʿī include shrines such as Imām Ali's shrine at Najaf or Imām Reza's shrine at Mashhad. Subsequent spaces include localised mosques, *Ḥusayniyahs*, *takiyahs*, *mawkibs* and local tents pitched for mourning purposes can be considered ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented sacred spaces. While some of these spaces have been discussed in the previous chapter, it is worth briefly outlining the significance of *zīyārah* (visit) in Shīʿī Islam.

Zīyārah (visit, pilgrimage)

In Shīʿī theology, *zīyārah* is sometimes used to denote the ritualisation of Karbalāʾ either physically or mentally.[858] According to Ayoub, "Unlike the hajj which is limited to a special session, the *zīyārah* of Imām Ḥusayn is possible, and equally effective, at any time and even at any place".[859] In Shīʿīsm, *zīyārah* denotes proximity to Karbalāʾ. Whether that is for a brief moment at a sacred tomb, or for a long period of time, performed a long way from Karbalāʾ

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[856] I am compelled to acknowledge and thank Muḥammad-Reza Fakhr-Rohani for his assistance in developing this taxonomical approach to ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces inside and outside Karbalāʾ.

[857] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 11 March 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

[858] *Zīyārah* is another form of spelling to *zīyārat*. The former comes from the Persian language and the latter comes from the Arabic language. Both are used interchangeably to refer to a pilgrimage to a holy site for the purpose of paying respects and seeking intercession. In Shīʿī Islam, it is a way of connecting with the Imāms and seeking intercession with God.

[859] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 183-184.

while facing its direction.[860] The sacred space of Karbalāʾ permits this distinct phenomenon in Shīʿī ritual. Describing the divine sanctity of Karbalāʾ, the fourth Shīʿī Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn told his followers:

> God made the spot of Karbalāʿ a sacred and safe haram 24,000 years before He created the earth of the Ka'bah and made it a sacred and secure haram. When moreover, God [exalted be He] shall cause the earth to quake and be melted, Karbalāʿ shall be lifted up as it is, luminous and pure, and placed in the highest gardens of paradise.[861]

In many ways, *zīyārah*, whether physical or spiritual, spatial or temporal - can be viewed as a covenant renewal between pilgrims and the Imāms. As Mozaffari notes, "the Karbala identity narrative either is incapable of defining a territory, or else that territory, or homeland, is understood subjectively as something spiritual and thus metaphysical".[862] It is for this reason, *zīyārah* represents a spatio-temporal source of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus', rather than a tangibly performative source such as the *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage.

Performative Sources: Pilgrimage

Performativity is a crucial aspect to the reproduction of collective identity. For the Shīʿa, the most salient example of pilgrimage reproducing collective Shīʿī identity is the *Arbaʿeen*. It is an overwhelming display of Shīʿa grief, belief, and solidarity that takes place 40 days after Āshūrā'. observance of *Arbaʿeen* keeps the memory of the Karbalāʾ tragedy alive, passing down Imām al-Ḥusayn story and values through generations. By commemorating *Arbaʿeen*

[860] *Ibid*, 187.

[861] *Ibid*, 181.

[862] Mozaffari, *Forming National identity in Iran*, 90.

each year, the narrative of Āshūrā' and Imām al-Ḥusayn's sacrifice is preserved, and his principles are upheld. The ritual observances allow people to reflect on the events at Karbalāʾ and renew their commitment to Imām al-Ḥusayn's cause. In this way, *Arbaʿeen* provides continuity between the past and present, transmitting Imām al-Ḥusayn legacy to future generations.

It is also the most significant religious social movement in the world, attracting around 40 million pilgrims annually.[863] Besides the Chinese Lunar new year, *Arbaʿeen* is the largest annual social movement in the world.[864] Iran and Shīʿas have criticised mainstream media for ignoring the event and its magnitude around the world.[865] According to various sources, the annual *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage was first observed in 61 AH/ 680 by Jabir Ibn Adb Allah, a *sahabah* (Companion of the Prophet).[866] One participant in this thesis noted that Jabir b. Abd Allah al-Anṣārī was a reliable Shīʿī companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and a truthful historian of the Ahl al-Bayt.[867] The *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage reifies the sentiments of ʿĀshūrāʾ

[863] A 2016 study conducted by Cristia, Dekeyser and Knox, quantitatively surveyed sentiments expressed by over 5000 Iraqi and Iranian pilgrims. See Fotini Cristia, Elizabeth Dekeyser and Dean Knox, "To Karbalāʾ" Survey Religious Shi'a from Iran and Iraq", *MIT*, https://web.mit.edu/cfotini/www/Shia_Pilgrims_Survey.pdf.

[864] Niall McCarthy, "Chinese New Year: The World's Largest Human Migration is About to Begin [Infographic]", *Wall Street Journal*, 14 February 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2018/02/14/chinese-new-year-the-worlds-largest-human-migration-is-about-to-begin-infographic/?sh=3bd18f43124d.

[865] Serina Sandhu, "Muslim Anti-Isis March Not Covered by Mainstream Media Outlets Says Organisers", *Independent*, 9 December 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslim-anti-isis-march-not-covered-mainstream-media-outlets-say-organisers-a6765976.html.

[866] Jaber bin Abdullah Ansari, "Companions and One of the Most Numerous Ḥadīths", *Encyclopaedia of the Muslim/ Islamic World*, https://rch.ac.ir/article/Details/10164.

[867] Interview with Qom-based religio-pragmatics professor, 11 March 2021 (HREC: Protocol 2020/079).

through performative rituals which reproduce collective identity. It is important to note, ʿĀshūrāʾ itself is the prime incentive; *Arbaʿeen* is simply a reminder and reinforcing factor.

The modern pilgrimage symbolises the day when the ʿĀshūrāʾ captives and survivors returned to Karbalāʾ to mourn and pay pilgrimage to Imām al-Ḥusayn and the rest of the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs. Ayoub writes,

> Any man who is beaten for making a pilgrimage will be given for every strike a houri, and for any pain, a thousand merits (hasanāt). The man who is killed for his devotion to the Holy Family and his determination to visit Ḥusayn's grave is a true martyr".[868]

According to Islamic instructions, it is highly recommended to pay pilgrimage to Imām al-Ḥusayn on *Arbaʿeen*. It is recommended to recite *zīyārat*-texts along the *Arbaʿeen* pilgrimage.[869] *Zīyārat* -texts or pilgrimage texts were first asserted by the sixth Infallible Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. However, the fifth Infallible Imām al-Bāqir also declared: "one pilgrimage to Karbalā on the day of 'Āshūrā' is equal to a thousand hajj pilgrimages and an equal number of engagements in the holy war with the prophets".[870] Texts in favour of Imām al-Ḥusayn such as the ʿĀshūrāʾ and *Arbaʿeen zīyārat*-texts, are recited with profound sentience and devotion. These texts are designed for recitation on the eve and day of *Arbaʿeen* for several reasons. They represent a means of expressing respect, courtesy, fidelity and loyalty to Imām al-Ḥusayn. Contained within such texts is the assertion that Imām al-Ḥusayn, whom Allah granted the commendable legatee of all the Divine prophets, sacrificed his life to rescue "mankind from

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[868] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 187.

[869] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 22.

[870] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Qawlawayh al Qummī, *Kāmil al-Zīyarāt*, ed. Mirzā ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn al-Amīmī al-Tabrīzi (Najaf: Murtadawīyyah, 1937), 162.

ignorance and for guiding the world to light, felicity and knowledge".[871] Along these pilgrimages, a variety of sacred rituals take place.

ʿĀshūrāʾ-Oriented Rituals

> *What the symbolic action is intended to control is primarily a set of mental and moral dispositions…* – Godfrey Lienhardt.[872]

Rituals are central to collective Shīʿī identity and the construction of Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics. ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals culminate in Karbalāʾ but take place around the Shīʿī world. A key source of collective identity reproduction, whether or not the ritual takes place in Karbalāʾ, they are always about Karbalāʾ. Because ʿĀshūrāʾ is based on the battle of Karbalāʾ, mundane spaces become sacralised spaces during times of ritual. As Mozaffari notes,

> the physical, material world is validated with reference to that terrain of Collective Imagination, which in turn reflects a shifting consensus of subject imaginations. It is the rituals that, however vaguely, bridge the individual and the collective in this instance.[873]

Taʿzīyah is one such ritual which bridges the individual and the collective. As previously mentioned, Chelkowski and Aghaie demonstrated the centrality of *taʿzīyah* rituals in Shīʿīsm to the western world in a way that had not been done before.[874] *Taʿzīyah* has three

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[871] *Ibid*.

[872] Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[873] Mozaffari, *Forming National Identity in Iran*, 84.

[874] Chelkowski, *Ta'ziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran;* Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*; See also Chelkowski, "From the Sun-Scorched Desert of Iran to the Beaches of Trinidad: Taʿziyeh's Journey from Asia to the

interpretations. First, *taʿzīyah* can be considered simply as mourning or a mourning ceremony. Second, in the context of Iran, *taʿzīyah* can refer to a public dramatisation where people express grief over the martyrs of Karbalāʾ and curse the enemies of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Third, in the Indian Subcontinent context, *taʿzīyah* refers to a decorated coffin that symbolises the decapitated body of Imām al-Ḥusayn and other ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs.[875]

Taʿzīyah rituals are deeply embedded in Shīʿī history and were initially held publicly before they posed a threat to the ʿAbbāsid's claims to authority. This prompted al-Mutawakkil (d.861) to destroy the tomb of Imām al-Ḥusayn and prohibit the ritual.[876] This did not end the ritual rather, according to Ayoub, they "served to strengthen the *taʿzīyah* tradition rather than to crush it".[877] By the 9th century, *taʿzīyah* rituals were observed across the Muslim world, with special houses for such celebrations known as *Ḥusaynīyyahs* being used as their starting point in cities such as Baghdad, Cairo and Aleppo.[878] The processions would begin in the *Ḥusaynīyyah* then move to the streets where followers would chant poems lamenting members of the Ahl al-Bayt,

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Caribbean"; Augustus Richard Norton, "Ritual, Blood, and Shiite Identity: ʿĀshūrāʾ in Banatiyya, Lebanon", *TDR: The Drama Review* 49:4 (2005): 140-155; Lara Deeb, "Living ʿĀshūrāʾ in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25:1 (2005): 122-137; Amin Karimnia and Maryam Sabbaghi, "Taʿziyeh and Declamation in Shia Tradition: Discourse in Focus", *The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances* 6:1 (2018): 53-66; Negar Mottahedeh, "Taʿziyeh: A Twist of History in Everyday Life" in *The Women of Karbala*, ed. Aghaie, 25-44.

[875] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 93.

[876] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 153.

[877] *Ibid*.

[878] *Ibid*, 154; Hussainiyas derive their name from Imām al-Ḥusayn and differ from mosques. These congregational halls typically host commemorative ceremonies associated with the Mourning of Muharram. Hussainiyas are central to Shīʿī gatherings and play a considerable role in the production of collective Shīʿī identity. It is important to note, however, that a *Ḥusaynīyyah* can be created in almost any place that is suitable for accommodating people and their religious practices. See Mozaffari, *Forming National Identity in Iran*, 76.

before returning to the *Ḥusaynīyyah*.[879] By the 16th century Safavid patronage evolved, *taʿzīyah* rituals into more expansive passion plays with people performing the various roles of the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs.[880] Contemporaneously, *taʿzīyah* rituals are similar to modern modern-day Iraqi *tashābīh*, which are dramatic re-enactments of the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Tashābīh or *masrah al-Ḥusayni* are dramatic re-enactments of the Battle of Karbalāʾ performed outside Iran, particularly in Najaf and Karbalāʾ. This ritual was banned during the Baʿathist era but gained popularity in Iraq after 2003. These rituals involve several professional actors, and Elbadri argues that *tashābīh* "it is not merely an exercise in religious narration, but a performance that meshes educational schemes with a theatrical boost to visualise the passion of Imām Huessin for a lay audience".[881] Because of their meticulous scripting, *tashābīh* is both a lamentative ritual and an educational performance. Aghaie notes that these elaborate events typically require financial support from either the state or wealthy individuals or organisations.[882] While less elaborate than Persian *taʿzīyah* performances, *tashābīh*, play an important role in reproducing of collective transnational Shīʿī identity.

Shanneik conducted a study on Women-only *tashābīh* rituals in Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Kingdom. She explains how women play an active role in creating a Shīʿī social

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[879] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 153.

[880] Babak Rahimi, *Theater State and the Formation of Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590-1641 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 199-234.

[881] Rachid Elbadri, *Shia Rituals: The Impact of Shia Rituals on Shia Socio-political Character* (London: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 29.

[882] Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*, 149; Kamran Aghaie, "The Origins of the Sunnite-Shiʿite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'zieh Tradition", *TDR: The Drama Review* 49:4 (2005): 42-47.

sensorium through their own bodies and senses, as individual minds and bodies operate within a sensorialised social context.[883] Shanneik argues that *tashābīh* is a social activity that enhances the sensory experience of the Karbalāʾ narrative both individually and collectively. [884] She identifies three ways in which the sensory experience of Karbalāʾ is stimulated during *tashābīh* rituals. First, the use of real blood from sheep, chickens or cows to soak costumes of key figures who died during ʿĀshūrāʾ creates a strong olfactory experience.[885] Second, the use of henna to inscribe marks on the body, which turns from green to red as it dries, reflects the emotional trajectory of the Karbalāʾ narrative.[886] Finally, the act of walking on hot coals, known as *mash ʿalā al-jamr*, symbolises the burning tents that Yazid's soldiers forced the ʿĀshūrāʾ survivors to walk over.[887] Collectively, these experiences contribute to a sensorialised Shīʿī sociality, where emotions, bodily feelings and visuality coalesce over the Karbalāʾ narrative. Observed globally, The *tashābīh* ritual, serves to reinforce and reproduce collective Shīʿī identity.

Al-Mawakib al-Ḥusayniyya refers to public mourning processions on main streets and in cities, which typically takes place on ʿĀshūrāʾ and during Arbaʿeen commemorations.[888] Sizes of these gatherings can vary from dozens to thousands of participants. During these processions, models of Ḥusayn's mausoleums are built to be carried or wheeled in procession. These

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[883] Yafa Shanneik, *The Art of Resistance in Islam: The Performance and Politics among Shi'i Women in the Middle East and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 96-125.

[884] *Ibid, 96*. For more on social sensorium, see Adam Y. Chau, "The Sensorial Production of the Social", *Ethnos* 73:4 (2008): 485-504.

[885] Shanneik, *The Art of Resistance in Islam*, 102.

[886] *Ibid*, 109.

[887] *Ibid,* 110.

[888] Oliver Scharbrodt, "Contesting Ritual Practices in Twelver Shiism: Modernism, Sectarianism and the Politics of Self-flagellation (*tatbīr*)", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2022): 1-24.

processions are particularly common in South Asia, where participants carry banners, flags and floats while elegies are recited using a loudspeaker.[889] The processions take place at a glacial walking tempo, oftentimes to the beat of drums.[890] Importantly, these public mourning processions are localised events capable of reproducing collective Shīʿī identity through expressions of faith which can symbolise solidarity, unity, resistance or advocacy.

Another Ḥusayni ritual with mnemonic features is chest-beating (*latm*). *Latm*, *latmiyat* or *matam* is a Muharram mourning chant accompanied by a chest-beating ritual that serves a mnemonic function. This ritual is widely practised and less controversial than *tatbīr*. It involves chest beating or clapping to the rhythm of a lamentative poem.[891] Szanto notes that in lieu of chest beating, "many women will slap their hands on their knees or thighs instead of their chests".[892] The key point however, is the ritual's mnemonic structure. Elbadri describes this repetitive ritual: "In unity with the rhythm, the mourners step together, taking a pace to the front, and then to the back, ending with all of them bending forward in unison while beating their chest".[893] The *latm* is a core component of many Muharram rituals and Shīʿī rituals more generally.

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[889] See Rehana Ghadially, "Gender and Moharram Rituals in an Ismaʿili Sect of South Asian Muslims", in *The Women of Karbala*, ed. Aghaie, 183-198

[890] Ali J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbalāʾ", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East* 25:1 (2005): 78-88.

[891] Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, 110-114; Deeb, "Living ʿĀshūrāʾ in Lebanon".

[892] Szanto, "Beyond the Karbala Paradigm", 82-83.

[893] Elbadri, *Shia Rituals*, 32.

Another noteworthy ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented ritual is the *pāminbarī*. This Persian term describes a mournful interlude or final part of a mournful lecture (*rowzeh khwānī*).[894] The *pāminbarī* is typically delivered by a non-cleric or *maddāh*.[895] These lectures are deeply emotive processions where preachers often bring audiences to tears for the misfortunes Imām al-Ḥusayn and his partisans endured on ʿĀshūrāʾ. The *pāminbarī* is a form of Ḥusayni minbar, an oral genre used to describe lectures about Imām al-Ḥusayn and the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Minbars are high platforms used by preachers, mourners or teachers to deliver lectures. In addition to poetic lamentations, lectures also include more general discussions on Islamic topics to increase audiences' awareness and knowledge on religious issues. Fakhr-Rohani writes,

> Those who constantly follow and accompany a famous preacher or cleric, take seat near the minbar and, at intervals, inspire the audience to pronounce salawāt or some invocative phrases, e.g., Yā Hoseyn, for adding more emotional warmth to the session.[896]

'Yā Hoseyn' is a common invocative phrase which is arguably the most mnemonic of all Shīʿī rituals. It traces its origin to the early days of the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide and is observed across the Shīʿī world. The phrase is particularly common during Muharram rituals but has also been popularised in *marthīyah* and *nohas*. *Nohas* are common in South Asia and several poets have composed songs in Urdu, Persian and Arabic. Globalisation immensely enhanced the transmission of *nohas*, with many gaining several million views on YouTube.[897] Therefore, *nohas* can be consumed in tangible communal spaces at a set time, or individually online on

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[894] *Ibid*, 81.

[895] *Ibid*.

[896] Fakhr-Rohani, *ʿĀshūrāʾ Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 75.

[897] "Kiya Muḥammad Ka Pyara Nahi Hun, Ali Shanawar & Ali jee 2013 14", *Youtube.com*, 8 November 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvLC10xxJjo.

any occasion. Having outlined some of the many modes of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals, it is important to discuss how objects are used as a reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

ʿĀshūrāʾ-Oriented Objects

Several ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented mnemonic objects contribute to the reproduction of collective identity. These objects trigger a memory or thought associated with the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ, an event that is central to the Shīʿī belief system. Examples include *alams* (banners), *mohrs* (small clay tablet), flags, and *turbah* (sacralised soil from Karbalāʾ). Although non-exhaustive, there are noteworthy key objects in the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'. The *alam* is an everyday object used in ʿĀshūrāʾ ceremonies across the Shīʿī world. They are prevalent in Iraq and Iran and across the Indian Subcontinent, Africa and West Asia. D'Souza and Denny describe how the *alam* can be considered a "symbol of presence" for Hyderabad's Shīʿas.[898] An *alam* is not a ritual but can be used as one. In isolation, it is an object carried by some mourners on mourning occasions.[899] The Shīʿī believe soil from Karbalāʾ is sacralised. Therefore, *turbah* (small quantity of soil) can be used to create *mohrs* and rosary beads. It is recommended to use such objects when pronouncing rituals and offering salat. The flag is another important object used during ritualistic processions.

Flags are symbolical objects which can communicate various messages at different times. For this reason, context is all important. During Muharram commemorations and funerals, the red

[898] Diane D'Souza and Frederick M. Denny, "The *Alam* – A Symbol of Presence", in *Partners of Zaynab: A Gendered Perspective of Shia Muslim Faith*, ed. Diane D'Souza (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 143-168.

[899] *Ibid*, 20.

flag of Imām al-Ḥusayn symbolises grief and despair. During religious demonstrations leading up to the 2005 Iraqi elections, the same flag can symbolise hope and optimism. Likewise, Shīʿī militias may use the flag to symbolise triumph or salvation. As Mozaffari notes, "symbols used in rituals are inherently polysemic containing a multitude of meanings. Thus, in the course of the rituals, there is not one, but many Karbala Inscriptions constructed simultaneously".[900] Having established its sources, the following section outlines the broader socio-institutional layers and components of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus'.

Levels of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus': Security, Socio-Institutional and Individual

The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' interacts directly and indirectly with world politics across three levels. The first level is defence, security and safety of the shrine. This requirement is foundational to the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' and thereby permits the subsequent layers' manifestations. The second layer is the socio-institutional level. Once security of the shrine is established, an array of socio-institutional manifestations is possible. These components can be artistic, educational, financial, institutional, medical, scholarly, and ritualistic manifestations. Some examples include educational schools, and institutions including *Ḥusayniyah* mosques and *mawkibs* (service tents). Medical and financial components consist of health clinics and religious monetary funds, endowments and charities.[901] Finally, ritual manifestations take shape through

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[900] Mozaffari, *Forming a National identity in Iran*, 89; This also echoes Anderson's thesis that socially constructed and imagined communities are created and sustained through shared cultural practices and symbols. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[901] For examples of religious charities, see "Misbah Al-Hussein Foundation Distributes Sacrificial Meat to Poor Families in Karbalāʾ in Cooperation with the Shirāzī Religious Authority Institutions", *Shia Waves*, 10 July 2022, https://shiawaves.com/english/news/islam/iraq/84036-misbah-al-hussein-foundation-distributes-sacrificial-meat-to-poor-families-in-Karbalāʾ-in-cooperation-with-the-Shirāzī-religious-authority-institutions/; "Om Abiha Institute Runs Charity Program in Holy Karbalāʾ", *AlShirāzī.org*, 9 June 2019, https://alShirāzī.org/news-item/13609?langs=EN; Karbalāʾ Charitable Foundation Continues to Provide

local gatherings and commemorative proceedings. At the socio-institutional level there exists a pair-wise symbiosis between each manifestation which is more profound as a collective than the sum of each manifestation. This effect necessitates and strengthens the reproduction of collective transnational Shīʿī identity. The final layer is the individual level. This level contains psychic intention and religio-devotional incentive which fosters an attitudinal religo-moral duty. Figure 27 depicts the implicative staircase whereby each layer is necessitated by the previous layer.

Services to Arbaeen Pilgrims for the Eighth Consecutive Day", *Shia Waves*, 15 September 2022, https://shiawaves.com/english/news/islam/iraq/85803-Karbalāʾ-charitable-foundation-continues-to-provide-services-to-arbaeen-pilgrims-for-the-eighth-consecutive-day/.

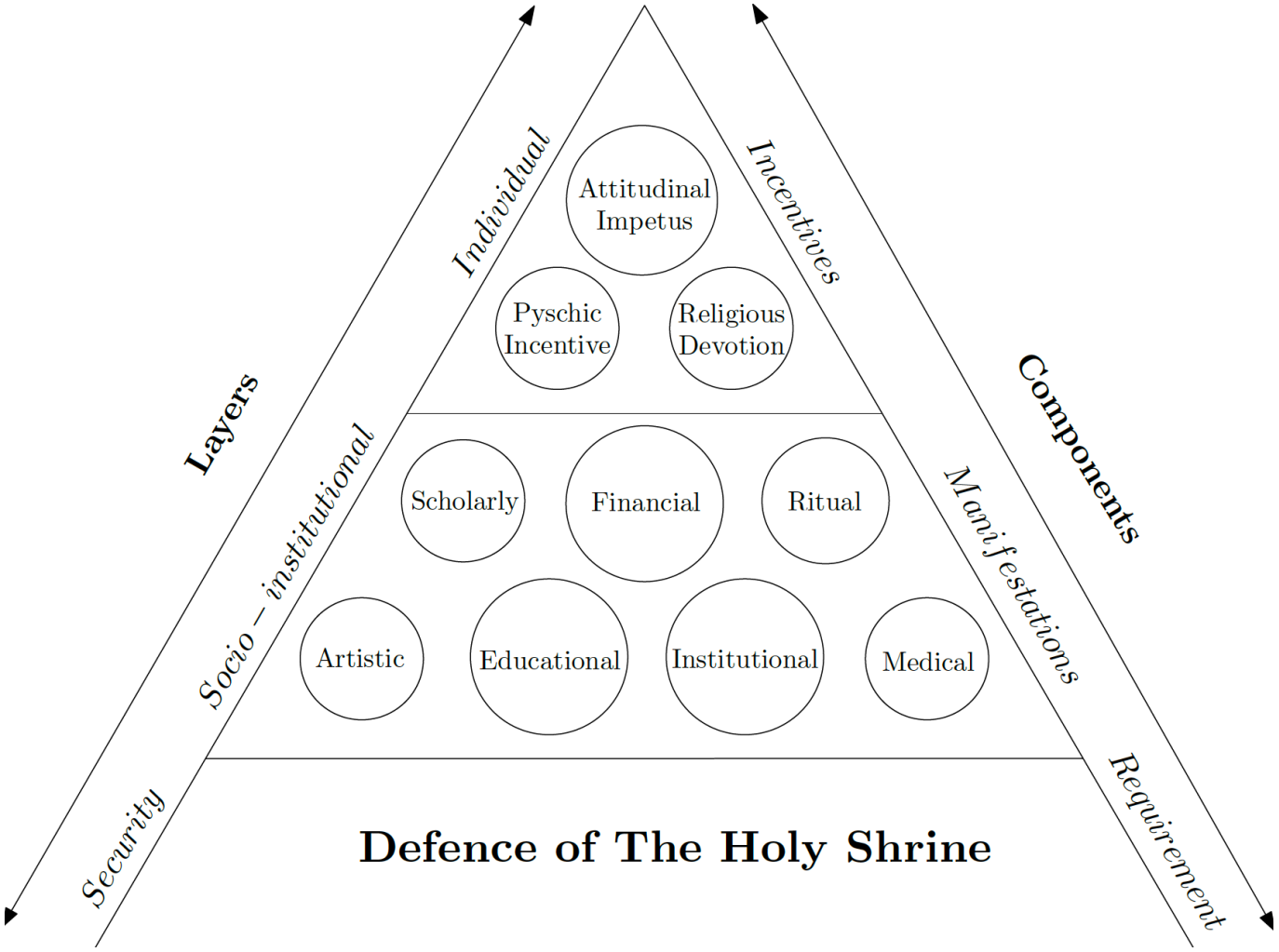

FIGURE 27 - LAYERS AND COMPONENTS OF THE 'ḤUSAYNI IMPETUS'. SOURCE: ORIGINAL SOURCE ADAPTED FROM CONVERSATION WITH MUḤAMMAD-REZA FAKHR-ROHANI.

The bottom two layers are relatively straightforward because they can be tangibly measured. If the security of the holy shrine is threatened, it is difficult for any of the other manifestations to materialise. The security requirement level has been brought into question several times throughout history. Examples include ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil's (d. 861) destruction of the shrine, the 1802 Wahhābī sack of Karbalāʾ, and attacks by Saddam Huessin's government forces during the 1991 Battle of Karbalāʾ. Socio-institutional manifestations are tangible but more difficult to measure than defence of the shrine. The individual incentives level is the most difficult to measure because it is the most intangible.

This level is difficult to gauge because it represents personal aspects of religiosity such as devotion, attitudinal impetus, and psychic incentive. People perform a variety of subjectivities at any given time such as being a father or mother, teacher or taxi driver. Therefore, the significance of religious devotion or attitudinal impetus is difficult to gauge in tangible terms. This layer of the Ḥusayni Impetus represents what Mahmood, in her study of women negotiating personal piety in Egypt, describes as the 'interiority' or 'inward disposition'.[902] Because this level primarily refers to personal piety, and personal piety is performed in various ways it is difficult to generalise. Additionally, it also relates to the broader issue of the mind-body (or interior and exterior) distinction and personhood, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.[903] This thesis aligns with Mahmood's assertion regarding inner spiritual experience and mindset that "there is no single conception of the self that corresponds to the discursive practices of a given culture, but that many different conceptions may exist simultaneously".[904] From the above discussions on objects, rituals and texts, a theoretical connection can be made between these sources of exteriorised ritual and the interiority as informing self-conception in relation to the social.

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[902] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 134.

[903] Because this research does not deal with participants in a comparative pietistic sense, it does not intend to draw any conclusions on this level other than to acknowledge the existence of this layer of volitional agency. As Evans-Pritchard notes: "Only chaos would result were anthropologists to classify social phenomenon by emotions which are supposed to accompany them, for such emotional states, if present at all, must vary not only from individual to individual, but also in the same individual on different occasions and even at different points in the same rite". See Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 44.

[904] *Ibid*, 121.

So far, this chapter has described the multitude of ways Karbalāʾ reproduces collective Shīʿī identity through ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented texts, spaces and rituals. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomena, it is important to examine the social significance of Imām al-Ḥusayn in world history, not just as a political figure, but as a broader symbol of justice and salvation for humanity. It is not only Imām al-Ḥusayn's personality that represents this universal virtue but the broader virtues of ʿĀshūrāʾ. This story, and its various ways of reproduction, are productive and generative sources of collective identity.

The Social Significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ and Imām al-Ḥusayn

The character, personality, mission, and output of Imām Ḥusayn is particularly distinct in Shīʿīsm and beyond. These factors contribute to the Karbalāʾ narrative's universal and archetypal qualities. His virtues of resistance to oppression, righteous suffering and nobility have been noted by several non-Muslim scholars. For example, British historian Edward Gibbon wrote: "In a distant age and climate, the tragic scenes of the death of Hossein will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader".[905] British Iranologist Edward Browne referred to Imām al-Ḥusayn as the "apostle of God".[906] Scottish Orientalist William Muir wrote: "The tragedy of Karbalāʾ decided not only the fate of the caliphate but of the Mohammedan kingdoms long after the caliphate had waned and disappeared".[907] These excerpts represent some examples highlighting the significance of Imām al-Ḥusayn and the Battle of Karbalāʾ in

[905] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Fred De Fau & Company, 1907), 104.

[906] Edward Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1919), 227.

[907] William Muir, *Annals of the Early Caliphate* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1883), 441-442.

oriental history. There is also reference to Imām al-Ḥusayn in the collected works of Mahatma Gandhi.

The principles and sacrifice of Imām al-Ḥusayn had a profound influence beyond just Islamic tradition. Gandhi, the leader of India's nonviolence movement, was moved by the story of Imām al-Ḥusayn's stand against oppression at Karbalāʾ. In Gandhi's writings, he reflected on how Imām al-Ḥusayn's commitment to truth and justice, even at the cost of his life, served as an inspiration for satyagraha or nonviolent resistance. Gandhi mentions Imām al-Ḥusayn at least three times in his collected works. He went to great lengths to use the story of Imām al-Ḥusayn and Imām al-Hassan as a reflection of their virtues in Islam. He wrote,

> Imām Hassan and Imām Hussain were merely two boys. They felt that an injustice had been done to them. When called upon to surrender, they refused. They knew at the time that this would mean death for them. If, however, they were to submit to injustice, they would disgrace their manhood and betray their religion. In these circumstances, they yielded to the embrace of death. The heads of these fine young men rolled on the battlefield. In my view, Islam did not attain its greatness by the power of the sword but entirely through the self-immolation of its fakirs. It is soldierlike to allow oneself to be cut down by a sword, not to use the sword on another.[908]

Gandhi was not only aware of Imām al-Ḥusayn's story but impacted by his virtues. This demonstrates Imām al-Ḥusayn's significance in world history and ʿĀshūrāʾs place in world politics. By recognising figures like Gandhi's connections to Imām al-Ḥusayn, we see how his sacrifice at Karbalāʾ has meaning that transcends sectarian boundaries. Imām al-Ḥusayn is also held in high esteem of many Sunnī scholars both historical and contemporaneous. Historian and prosopographer, Shamsoddīn adh-Dhahabī (d.1347) described Imām al-Ḥusayn as the

[908] Mahatma Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: XIII (January 1915 – October 1917)* vol.13 (Delhi: Navajivan Press, 1964), 518.

Prophet's "fragrant flower in this world".[909] Allāme Eben Sabbāgh al-Makkī (d.1451) was leader of the Mālekī creedal denomination (*madhhab*). Describing Imām al-Ḥusayn, he wrote, "Al-Hosayn's place in this noble family is in its most lofty heights, heights where the stars of the Heavens dare not tread".[910] Imām al-Ḥusayn was regarded for his erudition, piety and mastery of martial arts. According to the Egyptian writer, Abbās Mahmud Aqqād (d. 1963), "A large number of the Sufi orders and divines have taken the teachings that they rely on and refer to through him [Imām al-Ḥusayn].[911] In contemporary history, the Lebanese writer Omar Farrukh (d. 1987) declared: "Today we Muslims (in all lands) are in need of a Hosayn to guide us to the right path".[912] Dr. Muḥammad b. Fathollāh al-Badrān also praised Imām al-Ḥusayn as "a protégé of the House of Prophethood and was endowed with the most noble lineage and the most perfected spirit".[913] Finally, Dr. Zāhīya Dajjānī describes Imām al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom as, "The most prominent legend of abnegation and self-sacrifice in history".[914] Affirmations of Imām al-Ḥusayn's sublime personality are not limited to Islam, several Christian scholars have also written about his universal virtues.

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[909] Shamsoddīn adh-Dhahabī, *Siyaru A'lam Al-Nubala'i* (The lives of Noble Figures) (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1990), 282.

[910] Allāme Eben Sabbāgh al-Makkī quoted in Masoud Emami, *The Shī'a Imāms in the Words of Preeminent Sunni Scholarship* (New York: Lantern Publications, 2021).

[911] Abbās Mahmud Aqqād quoted in Emami, *The Shī'a Imāms in the Words of Preeminent Sunni Scholarship*, 65.

[912] Omar Farrukh quoted in Emami, *The Shī'a Imāms in the Words of Preeminent Sunni Scholarship*, 65.

[913] Muḥammad b. Fathollāh al-Badrān quoted in Emami, *The Shī'a Imāms in the Words of Preeminent Sunni Scholarship*, 66.

[914] Zāhīya Dajjānī quoted in Emami, *The Shī'a Imāms in the Words of Preeminent Sunni Scholarship*, 67.

Two examples of ecumenism regarding the personality of Imām al-Ḥusayn are noteworthy. First is Antoine Bara's portrayal of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Hussain in Christian Ideology. He writes,

> Hosayn is the Lord of the Martyrs in the fields of the battle for justice. He is a person whose insurrection is the practical application of the inner voice of all the divine religions throughout the course of history… Hosayn is the essence of every religion throughout every era.[915]

This emphasis on Ḥusayn's as the essence of every religion throughout every era highlights the universality of Ḥusayn's story as extending beyond Shīʿī Islam. South African Catholic Priest Christopher Clohessy has also written extensively about the ʿĀshūrāʾ martyrs.[916] Both Bara and Clohessy's works present a Christian perspective of the praiseworthy traits of Imām al-Ḥusayn. In contrast, Tasi Bradford Perkins, a Methodist Pastor, explores themes of liminal passion in the *maqātil* al-Ḥusayn in his PhD dissertation. His study takes a comparative approach which equates Ḥusayn in Islam to Jesus in Christianity.[917] Describing the similarities of both figures, Perkins writes,

> Neither is exempt from full humanity and the consequences thereof. At the same time, neither is a mere mortal – both are imbued with extra-natural properties and live eternally beside God's throne' both are conduits by which believers enter everlasting bliss.[918]

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[915] Antoine Bara, *Hussain in Christian Ideology* (New York: International Publishing Company, 1974), 363.

[916] See Christopher Clohessy, *Half of my Heart: The Narratives of Zaynab, Daughter of 'Ali* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2018); Christopher Clohessy, *Angels Hastening: The Karbalā'' Dreams* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2021).

[917] Perkins, "The Thirst, and the Sun, and the Bleeding".

[918] *Ibid*, 252.

This forms the basis through which both figures can be seen as representing an unchanging position of 'suffering humanity'. Both straddle the temporal and cosmic realms, between humanity and divinity. The *maqātil* genre encapsulates this duality by portraying Ḥusayn as a liminal hero who attains "victory through defeat, pleasure through suffering, eternality through mortality".[919] Perkins' examination of Ḥusayni maqtals demonstrate another way in which the universal personality of Imām al-Ḥusayn constructs Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics. Due to his association to Karbalāʾ, the city possesses generative power as the central pin, point or source of collective Shīʿī identity.

There is also a more apocryphal line of history that associates Imām al-Ḥusayn with other global revolutionaries. Shīʿī news media outlets frequently point out that revolutionary figures from Nelson Mandela to Che Guevara drew inspiration from the story of Imām al-Ḥusayn.[920] Although these quotes cannot be verified and are likely apocryphal, they reveal a great deal about the centrality of ʿĀshūrāʾ as a revolutionary pivot in world politics for the Shīʿa. Indeed, as Aghaie writes, "The Karbalā' narrative in turn, became the axis around which of history revolves for the Shīʿīs".[921] Collectively, these depictions demonstrate how the Karbalāʾ narrative is portrayed as a universal, archetypal story of justice against injustice, resistance against tyranny and oppression. These portrayals are also evident in the works of Ali Shariati.

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[919] *Ibid*, 254.

[920] Shervin Abdolhamidi, "The Spirit of ʿĀshūrāʾ", *Tehran Times*, 22 October 2017, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/417807/The-spirit-of-ʿĀshūrāʾ.

[921] Aghaie, "Gender-coded Symbols and Public Religious Rituals in Post-Revolutionary Iran", 80.

Imām al-Ḥusayn and the writings of Ali Shariati

The description of Imām al-Ḥusayn in the above discussions resembles Ali Shariati's notion of "The Ideal Man, The Viceregent of God".[922] Shariati poetically describes this ideal man as one who "holds the sword of Caesar in his hand and has the heart of Jesus on his breast. He thinks with the brain of Socrates and loves God with the heart of Halklaj".[923] Echoing Bara's words of Ḥusayn as "the essence of every religion throughout every era", Shariati writes: "Like Jesus, he bears a message of love and reconciliation, and like Moses, lie is the messenger of jihad and deliverance".[924] Likewise, echoing Perkins' point about his position as a liminal figure, Shariati describes him as a man who has dissolved his transient individuality in the eternal identity of the human race, who through the negation of self becomes everlasting".[925] These portrayals demonstrate how Imām al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom at Karbalāʾ – represents a 'mythos' or master-narrative or mnemonic for behaviour and temporality much larger than the historical event in isolation.

The Karbalāʾ Paradigm as an ʿĀshūrāʾ Motivation

The mnemonic power of the Karbalāʾ narrative is reproduced in a variety of ways. In addition to space, text, ritual, poetry and performative drama, ʿĀshūrāʾ is poetically ritualised both intellectually and imaginatively in Karbalāʾ. Ritualistic observations in Fisher's 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm' sees commendable or 'prescribed' deeds as forming a model of behaviour reinforced by intellectual rationalism. The ritualisation of the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative through

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[922] Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkely: Mizan Press, 1979), 122.

[923] *Ibid*, 123.

[924] *Ibid*.

[925] *Ibid*.

textual anthologies establish and inspire a form of intellectual rationalism, while prescribed poetic rituals inspire imaginative performativity. Together, these sources of collective identity encourage prescribed deeds based on an ʿĀshūrāʾ-based religio-moral duty or 'impetus' which reproduces collective Shīʿī identity.

Fisher's paradigm uncovers basic elements of how the Karbalāʾ Paradigm might inspire an ʿĀshūrāʾ Motivation. By observing high levels of emotional investment during ʿĀshūrāʾ commemorations, he identified observance of prescribed deeds such as prayer, fasting, *taʿzīyah* and Muslim passion plays, and "Pilgrimage to Imām ʿAlī and al-Ḥusayn and other Imāms, and the Hajj".[926] Fischer's observations in Karbalāʾ offers insight into how sacred spaces, and various prescriptive deeds reproduce collective Shīʿī identity, enhance the perceptual value of the ʿĀshūrāʾ, and stimulate a Ḥusayni-inspired impetus or model for behaviour. As Fischer notes, "There is a recursive quality to the Karbalāʾ Paradigm. It can be expanded or elaborated".[927] The recursive process of Karbalāʾ as a sacred shrine city contains sacred spaces of pilgrimage and ritual inspired by textual anthologies, historiographies and narratives, demonstrates how Karbalāʾ reproduces collective identity through ʿĀshūrāʾ.[928]

The process described above represents a recursive cycle of collective identity where Karbalāʾs places, spaces and spots inspire the composition and consumption of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented textual cosmologies and performance of prescribed rituals. This enhances the perceptual value of

[926] Fischer, *Iran*, 27.

[927] *Ibid*, 26.

[928] Figure 28.

ʿĀshūrāʾ intellectually through textual cosmologies and poetically through their ritualisation. Collectively this encourages prescribed deeds such as prayer, fasting during Ramaḍān, fulfilling *zakāt* and *khums* donations, participation in Muharram rituals, and performing *ziyārah*. Acceptance of these deeds can initiate a religio-moral duty or 'Ḥusayni Impetus' which can also be thought of as an ʿĀshūrāʾ motivation.[929] This contributes to the preservation and reproduction of collective identity which serves as a mnemonic model for behaviour and temporality.[930] This cycle is recursive because it is ongoing and illustrates how the city of Karbalāʾ reproduces collective identity based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ and its contemporary ritualisation.

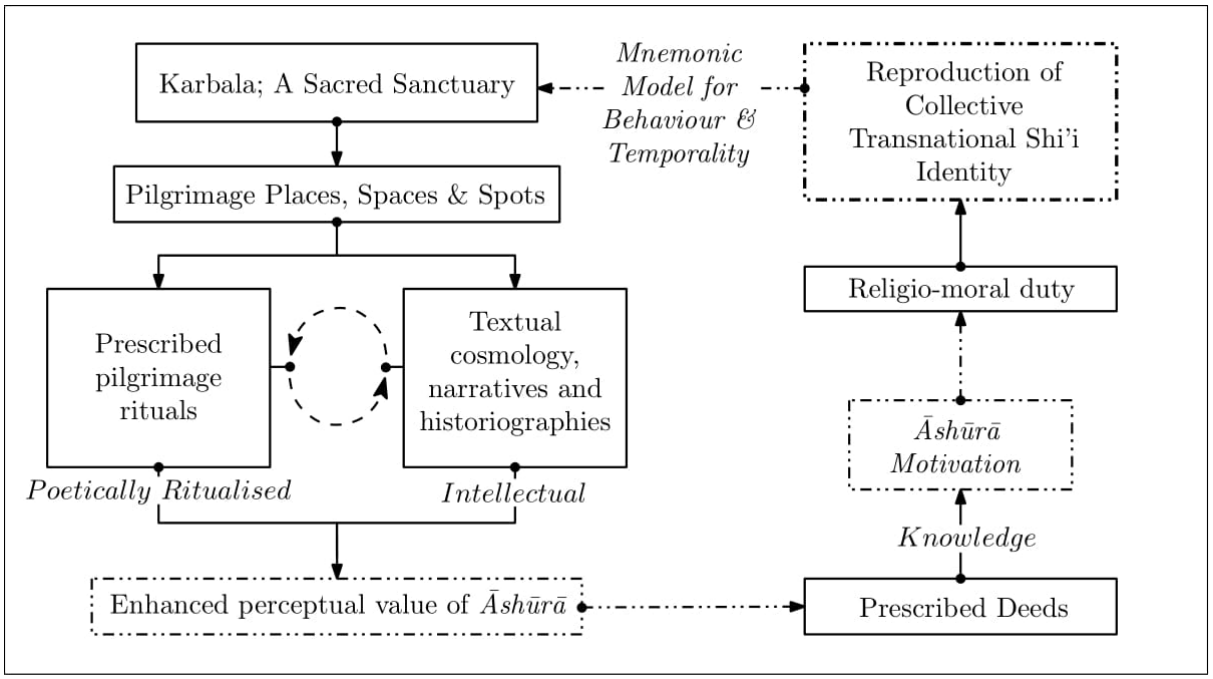

FIGURE 28 - RECURSIVE CYCLE OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY REPRODUCTION IN KARBALĀʾ. SOURCE: ORIGINAL SOURCE.

[929] ʿĀshūrāʾ motivation is a more gender-inclusive term which accounts for other important aspects in the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ such as Zaynab's role. See for example, Kamran Aghaie, ed. *The Women of Karbalāʾ: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Shiʿi Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

[930] See Fischer, *Iran*, 26.

Figure 28 links space with Alder and Pouliot's understanding of practice as "competent performances" and "socially meaningful patterns of action".[931] Stein follows this line of inquiry arguing:

> A "community of practice is a configuration of a *domain of knowledge* that constitutes like-mindedness, a *community of people* that 'create the social fabric of learning, and a *shared practice* that embodies 'the knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains".[932]

Figure 28 highlights how these shared practices contribute to the reproduction of a distinct collective identity based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. This link between spatiality and practice is also evident in Bourdieu's *Distinction*, which emphasises the influential role of practices and location in shaping one's identity.[933] He posits that cultural preferences contribute to establishing boundaries that divide French society into distinguishable classes. Bourdieu argues that social divisions emerge through a conscious adoption of observable behaviours by individuals within particular groups, asserting the close relationship between group identity formation and distinctive actions exhibited publicly in claimed spaces. The interconnection between ritual and space is not static but rather evolves over time as communities accumulate historical experiences which imbue certain locations with greater significance; consequently, visiting sacred sites or engaging in specific rituals becomes an expression of collective identity

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[931] Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, "International Practices: Introduction and Framework", in *International Practices*, eds. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3-36, 6.

[932] Janice G. Stein, "Background Knowledge in the Foreground: Conversations About Competent Practice in "Sacred Space", in *International Practices*, ed. Adler and Pouliot, 87.

[933] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

for these delineated groups. Therefore, shrines as pilgrimage destinations and their related rituals function as explicit indicators of collective identity.

This conclusion clarifies Karbalāʾs construction as a generative pivot in world through its assemblage of devotional rituals and beliefs which reproduce collective identity. It highlights the tangible and intangible sites and sources of collective Shīʿī identity, which demonstrate the possibility of an ʿĀshūrāʾ-based religio-moral duty, reinforced by sources of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' and materialised in its socio-institutional manifestations. This duty ranges from consuming and reciting *zīyārat*-texts to composing and translating them. It is important to note that these rituals and practices are not ends in themselves. Rather, they serve as a vessel for believers to connect with the Imāms. As Ayoub notes,

> From the beginning, the impetus was provided by the imāms themselves, who promised great rewards for the tears of the devotees. The promise of eternal bliss and security nourished and even encouraged the hopes and aspirations of the community for a better life even in this world… Whether through weeping, the composition and recitation of poetry, showing compassion and doing good to the poor or carrying arms, the Shīʿī Muslim saw himself helping the Imāms in his struggle against the wrong (*zulm*) and gaining for himself the same merit (thawab) of those who actually fought and died for him.[934]

Szanto has offered an alternative to the 'modern' and 'revolutionary' dichotomous treatments of the 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'.[935] Szanto persuasively argues that "it is more analytically productive to pay closest attention to affect, as it can help us re-think the "revolutionary" mode

[934] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 55.

[935] Szanto, "Beyond the Karbala Paradigm".

of the Karbalāʾ Paradigm in broad terms".[936] This is evident in Karbalāʾ and demonstrated through the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' as co-constituted through textual intellectualism, which is traditional and ritualistic imagination, which is salvific.[937] Sources are grounded in theoretical dogma based on the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ and ritualised through practical piety. This highlights the various sources of devotionalism that are often overlooked when discussing the so-called 'Karbalāʾ Paradigm'. This chapter reveals a deeper understanding of Ḥusayni-rituals by introducing the variable of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces to any paradigm social scientists might seek to impose on 'Karbalāʾ in Shīʿī Islam.

This chapter provides an understanding of collective Shīʿī identity and Karbalāʾ in IR that transcends binaries inherent to the Karbalāʾ Paradigm. The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' is expressed and reproduced in multiple ways including books, stories, historiographies, icons, poetical anthologies, pilgrimage, space, and an array of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented rituals. The development of *Maqtals* as a source of collective Shīʿī identity is particularly generative. What distinguishes Maqtal literature is its continuous evolution over centuries. As various authors have added their own perspectives, interpretations, and stylistic elements, this body of literature has grown and developed dynamically. Its enduring production and transmission over time demonstrate the cultural and religious importance of the events of Karbalāʾ within Shīʿī Islam.

The narrative of ʿĀshūrāʾ serves as a unifying story of identity for Shīʿī Muslims worldwide. This makes it adaptable to a range of contemporary issues, including the oppression faced by

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[936] *Ibid*, 88.

[937] This resembles Adler and Pouliot's observation that "practice rests on *background knowledge* which it embodies, enacts, and reifies all at once". See Adler and Pouliot, "International Practices", 8.

groups such as Palestinians, refugees, Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan, African Americans, and Dalits in India. The story of Imām al-Ḥusayn's moral courage in sacrificing himself to resist injustice continues to inspire solidarity with oppressed peoples globally. His stand at Karbalāʾ represents a pivotal moment resonating through time. Therefore, Karbalāʾ as the physical site of these events generates symbolic power as a touchstone for resistance against tyranny. The appeal of ʿĀshūrāʾ crosses borders, with its message of defiant struggle against injustice finding receptivity among various marginalised groups seeking meaning and emancipation.

The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' is intricately connected to collective Shīʿī identity and Karbalāʾs place in world politics. It refers to the religious and moral duty that Shīʿas feel to commemorate and honour Imām-al-Ḥusayn through various rituals, spaces, texts, and practices. These include pilgrimage to Karbalāʾ, reciting elegies, participating in ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals, building *Husseiniyahs*, etc. This shared sense of duty binds Shīʿas together across borders and helps reproduce a collective Shīʿī identity centred on ʿĀshūrāʾ. The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' manifests across multiple levels - from defending the sanctity of Imām-al-Ḥusayn shrine to individual devotion. This multi-dimensional phenomenon helps reinforce Karbalāʾ as the focal point of Shīʿī identity worldwide. The defence of Imām-al-Ḥusayn shrine is foundational, while activities like pilgrimage and reciting texts related to his martyrdom create a shared experience and narrative.

This chapter described how the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' initiates a 'virtuous cycle' - spaces, rituals and texts related to Imām-al-Ḥusayn inspire moral duty and pious deeds among Shīʿas, in turn reproducing collective identity and enhancing Karbalāʾs centrality. This positions Karbalāʾ as

a generative pivot - fostering transnational Shīʿī identity and solidarity. Imām-al-Ḥusayn's universal virtues as a symbol of resistance to tyranny also allow the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' to resonate beyond sectarian lines. His martyrdom at Karbalāʾ represents a pivotal mythos and master narrative of good against evil. This lends moral power to the city as a touchstone for global struggles against oppression. Ultimately, the multifaceted 'Ḥusayni Impetus' helps reinforce Karbalāʾs symbolic potency as the nucleus of Shīʿī identity and history. Through shared rituals and beliefs focused on Imām-al-Ḥusayn martyrdom, it sustains Karbalāʾs significance as a pivotal source of collective meaning and action.

The sources of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' are co-constitutive, with each object, place, act, or artistic work reproducing collective Shīʿa identity because it draws inspiration from the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Mainstream International Relations theory is dominated by state-centric and Eurocentric conceptions of power, leaving little space to understand non-Western transnational sources of power. This chapter has attempted to capture the diverse contingent sources that sustain the power of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus. It is worth noting this Shīʿī power and resistance ideology is often solely associated with the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran. However, as this chapter contends, the roots of this power and identity have a much richer history dating back to the first oral *maqtal* deliveries in the 7th century. To link the power of ʿĀshūrāʾ in world politics only to a state established in the late 20th century overlooks the profoundly historical power of this collective identity. Combining these findings with those in Chapter Five provides a wider understanding of collective Shīʿī identity and the role of Karbalāʾ in International Relations, even if not a complete explanation.

Conclusion

The chapter takes another step in arguing that Karbalāʾs tangible and intangible ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces, texts and rituals reproduce a spatial form of collective identity. As the central point or pin of Shīʿī identity and history, this form of collective identity represents a generative pivot in world politics. The chapter began by explaining why the Karbalāʾ narrative is more than a historical narrative or 'tragedy'. The second section outlined how the Karbalāʾ martyrdom narrative is constructed as a symbol of justice and freedom in world politics. The third section examined how the sources of the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' and its manifestations reproduces collective Shīʿī identity at the individual and socio-institutional levels. The final section addressed the social significance of Imām al-Ḥusayn as a universal and archetypal figure for human salvation.

The chapter has shown through sacred spaces and narratives of collective memory that Karbalāʾ reproduces a collective identity capable of initiating of an individual religio-moral duty, impetus or 'ʿĀshūrāʾ motivation'. The various rituals and objects associated with the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' possess mnemonic qualities which contribute to the reproduction of collective identity. The implicative staircase deduced from Fakhr-Rohani's 'Ḥusayni Impetus' is one example of the virtuous dynamic of collective identity reproduction inspired by the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the process in which Karbalāʾ reproduces collective transnational Shīʿī identity through its pilgrimage places, spaces and rituals associated with the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ.

Conclusion

In March 2021, Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistānī met in Najaf for the first face-to-face inter-faith dialogue between Najaf's clerical authority and the Vatican. This historic meeting took place despite Covid-19 pandemic and concerns about the security situation in Iraq. Pope Francis travelled to Najaf as a self-described "pilgrim of peace", stating that "peace does not demand winners and losers".[938] Prior to this meeting, there had been a strong liaison between the two institutions, with Sistānī issuing a condolence *bayan* in 2005 after the death of Pope John Paul II. During the meeting, Pope Francis and Ayatollah Sistānī discussed the security situation in Iraq, the importance of inter-faith dialogue, and threats to Christian minorities in the country. The is a prime example of Najaf's clerical advocacy in world politics.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore two ways Shīʿī shrine cities are constructed as 'pivots' in world politics. The first was as a verb – to turn or balance on a central point. The second was as a noun – meaning the central point, pin, or shaft on which a mechanism turns or oscillates. This thesis explored the verb use through the agential power of Najaf's clerical authority which 'pivots' world politics through various modes of advocacy. The noun use of 'pivot' highlighted how Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and rituals generatively reproduce collective identity. By approaching shrines in world politics from this perspective, this thesis highlighted two sources of power in Shīʿī shrine cities: the agential power of Najaf's clerical authority and the productive power of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and rituals.

[938] "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Francis in Iraq (5 to 8 March 2021) Courtesy Visit to the Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistānī and Interreligious Meeting in Ur, 06.03.2021", *Holy See Press Office*, 6 March 2021, https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/06/210306a.html.

Shrines as Temporal and Spatial Pivots in World Politics

Shīʿī shrine cities are not typically considered subject-worthy methodological units of analysis in world politics. But they significantly pivot world politics in at least two ways. A temporal approach to Najaf reveals the agential power of its clerical authority. A spatial approach to Karbalāʾ reveals how generative sacred spaces and productive ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented-rituals and textual cosmologies reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. Utilising two distinct but related disciplines, this thesis demonstrated how Shīʿī shrine cities are constructed as pivots in world politics. Process sociology and historical IR animate how Najaf's clerical authority pivots world politics and the sociology of space animates how Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics.

Critical Temporalities

This thesis' temporal approach demonstrated how Najaf's religious authority has a significant influence on world politics through various forms of advocacy during what this thesis termed 'critical temporalities'. Critical temporalities are periods where global, local, and transnational orders coincide.[939] The first case study demonstrated how international developments such as Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' speech and the League of Nations impeded British imperial ambitions in Iraq. The second case examined the critical temporality where the US sought to impose order on a region it perceived as dangerous and unstable. Both periods

[939] Hom describes critical temporalities as "extensive and repeated encounters with discordant change". See Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*, 235; Dodge describes these critical temporalities as periods where both Britain and the US respectively, "sought to reimpose stability [on the international system] by reworking the existing Westphalian notion of state sovereignty". See Dodge, "The Contradictions of Exogenous State-building in Historical Perspective", 189.

involved considerable agency from Najaf's clerical authority which transcend binary explanatory classifications such as 'quietist', 'pragmatic' or 'rational'.

Extant literature on the critical temporalities examined typically takes the perspective of colonial Britain in the 20th century or American imperialism in the 21st century.[940] They portray a macro-perspective of imperial conquest which leaves little space for clerical advocacy in Iraq's southern cities. Other studies on these critical temporalities concentrate on the tribal dynamics leading up the 1920 Iraqi revolution, the complex political landscape following the US-led invasion, and the subsequent sectarianisation of Iraq's political field.[941] While these portrayals are not without merit, they understandably overlook some important details of the clerical authority amidst a sea of other factors. Recent studies have portrayed Iraq's clerical authority as a group of "patriotic ayatollahs", but this label only captures part of the story.[942] The clerical authority was patriotic insofar as it sought to preserve its institutional integrity, a characteristic that predates nationalism or patriotism. Describing the clerical authority as "patriotic ayatollahs" falls short of acknowledging its unintentional role in institutionalising an elite ethno-sectarian political model in Iraq.[943]

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[940] Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*.

[941] Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*; Atiyyah, *Iraq*; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*; Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered"; Dodge, *Iraq*; Haddad, *Understanding Sectarianism*; Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field".

[942] Sayej, *Patriotic Ayatollahs*.

[943] As Dodge, Patel and others point out. See Dodge and Mansour, "Sectarianization and De-sectarianization in the Struggle for Iraq's Political Field"; Dodge, "Iraq's Informal Consociationalism and its Problems"; Dodge, "The Failure of Peacebuilding in Iraq"; Patel, *Order Out of Chaos*; Alshamary, "Religious Peacebuilding in Iraq".

This thesis covers the period from 1911-1920 and 2003-2014, but Najaf's sacred authority has a long history dating back to at least 1325, when Ibn Battuta noted that the city was governed by the representative of religious nobility (*naqib al-ashraf*).[944] In recent times, Najaf's clerical authority has played a crucial role in setting agendas beyond local scholastic initiatives and national projects such as the democratisation of Iraq. The ability of Najaf's *marjaʿiyya* to establish partnerships with leaders of the UN and the Vatican suggests that cities may have a larger role in world politics than traditionally recognised by the Westphalian models of inter-state relations.

Chapters Three and Four investigated the synoptic theme of clerical advocacy, and examined strategies employed by Najaf's clerical authority during different temporal junctures in world politics. Chapter Three concentred on the clerical authority's resilience and resistance in the lead-up to the establishment of the British Mandate, between 1911-1921. The chapter revealed how the clerical authority effectively utilised religious identity as a unifying force in a society that was deeply stratified along tribal lines. Amidst the outbreak WWI, *fatwās* emerged as a potent tool for the clerical authority to confront the threat of British colonialism and pivot world politics. In particular, Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzim al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī al-Yazdī played a crucial role in supporting the Ottoman's declaration of holy war against the Entente powers in 1914.

[944] Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 86.

Najaf became a key site of resistance against the British administration during the early 20th century. In 1918, a group comprising low-ranking clerics, tribal notaries, and grassroots youth supporters formed the League of the Islamic Awakening (*Jimʿyat al-Nahda al-Islamiya*) and orchestrated the assassination of the British governor of Najaf. The incident triggered nationwide protests, which prompted the British to besiege Najaf between March-May of the same year, effectively isolating the city and cutting off its water supplies. Although al-Yazdī did not support the League, he assumed a mediating role between the rebels and the British. The non-bureaucratised structure of Iraq's 20th century *ḥawza* enabled other high-influence, low-responsibility clerics, such as Ayatollah Muḥammad Taqī al-Shirāzī to wield significant influence and pivot world politics.

In contrast to al-Yazdī, al-Shirāzī displayed greater support for the League and was less willing to engage in negotiations with the British. He is remembered for his role in the resistance against the British after al-Yazdī's passing, issuing two *fatwās* preceding the 1920 Iraqi Revolt. However, less attention has been paid to the two telegrams he sent to President Wilson in 1919 in response to his 'Fourteen Points' speech. In the telegrams, al-Shirāzī advocated for the self-determination referenced in Wilson's speech. While al-Shirāzī's telegrams ultimately went unanswered, they demonstrate that the relationship between the clerical authority and the international system is more intricate than typically portrayed.

Chapter Three not only examined the advocacy of Najaf's clerical authority to the League of Nations but also highlighted correspondence between the sacred authority and King George V concerning the preservation of sacred cultural heritage. Baaʿthist historiography downplayed the role of Najaf's *ḥawza*, portraying it as pro-British before and during the revolt. As Chapter

Three outlined, the Baʿath party's suppression of the role of Najaf's clerical authority during this time has had lasting effects on the historiography of Iraq.[945] As a result, the critical influence of the clerical establishment was minimised in Iraqi history. Recent interpretations of primary sources reveal that the *ḥawza* was not homogenous in its stance, and that the revolt was the result of both anti-British sentiments, driven by religious identity, as well as pan-Arab nationalism. Clerical advocacy in Iraq during the 20th and 21st centuries, exhibited similar sentiments that centred on ideals of patriotism and preservation of the religious establishment. However, the impact of this advocacy differed due to the varied ways in which it was transmitted, interpreted, mobilised, and utilised to legitimise certain actions.

Religious identity played a crucial role in unifying a society divided along tribal lines. The uprisings of 1918 served as an important precursor to the revolt of 1920. Nationalist historians praise Shirāzī for being a courageous pioneer while criticising the actions of al-Yazdī for not taking a stronger stance during this time. However, it is important to note that the events of this period were determined less by individual personalities and more by the constraints of institutional responsibility.[946]

There are some notable temporal and structural differences between the periods studied in this thesis. For example, in the 21st century, sectarian violence became more prominent in Iraq, while in the 20th century it was not a significant factor. The adoption of sectarian identities was encouraged and incentivised by the imposed political field in the 21st century. In the 20th

[945] Davis, *Memories of the State*.

[946] Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests".

century, sectarian solidarity was incentivised to resist colonialism. The 21st century *ḥawza* is more bureaucratised than it was in the previous century, which may explain the wider sense of institutional responsibility among elite-ranking clerics. Technological advancements such as the printing press in the 20th century and the internet at the beginning of the 21st century also enhanced the transmission and consumption of *fatwās*. However, these advancements did not amount to a linear development of clerical advocacy in world politics.

Chapter Four examined the critical temporality period following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq where Iraq's institutional state capacities were decimated, and its political field was subsequently contested by a plurality of local and international political actors. It demonstrated a paradoxical element to the clerical authority's advocacy between the 2003 US-led invasion and Sistānī's 2014 *jihād fatwā*. The clerical authority advocated against sectarianism and promoted a nationalistic vision for Iraq. However, elite actors mobilised this advocacy to impose an ethno-sectarian vision on Iraq's political field. The *ḥawza* succeeded in bringing Iraq to elections and ratifying a constitution through a national referendum, but consequently institutionalised an elite informal consociational bargain. This enhanced the salience of sectarian identities in Iraq's political field and contributed to the continuation of the consociational elite political bargain.

Following the 2005 elections, Iraq experienced intense sectarian violence, which the clerical authority was unable to mitigate. Recognising the limitations of his authority, Sistānī withdrew from politics until ISIS directly threatened the *ḥawza* institution in 2014. After Iran announced its intention to deploy forces to protect the shrines, on 13 June 2014 Sistānī issued his pivotal collective obligation *fatwā*. Devoid of sectarian language, Sistānī's *fatwā* called on all abled-

bodied citizens to defend the nation and its holy sites and urged volunteers to join only the national army. However, the *fatwā* unintentionally validated and legitimated the existence of militia groups operating in Iraq outside of the control of the state, and inadvertently furthered Iran's geostrategic objectives in Iraq and beyond. Therefore, while Sistānī's advocacy had a significant impact mobilising citizens to defend the nation, it also had unforeseen consequences that contributed to the continuing instability in Iraq. In general, despite contrary intentions, it can be concluded that clerical advocacy contributed to the sectarianisation of Iraq's political field in the 21st century. This contrasts the clerical authority's role in the 20th century.

The clerical authority's advocacy in the 21st century and its unintended consequence of increasing the salience of sectarian identities in Iraq contrasts its advocacy in the 20th century. While the clerical authority was generally obeyed by local publics but dismissed by international audiences in the 20th century, the reverse was true in the 21st century. Although the clerical authority's advocacy successfully led to elections to Iraq, it unintentionally contributed to a sectarianised political landscape and institutionalised the elite political bargain. Despite these domestic shortcomings, the clerical authority pivoted world politics by exerting considerable influence on both the UN and the US during the occupation. Although the clerical authority held sway over local audiences regarding some issues, such as the importance of participating in elections, they were ignored on other matters, particularly sectarian violence and civil disobedience. Consequently, this thesis argues that towards the end of the occupation, the clerical authority's impact on international audiences was more substantial than on local publics.

Several temporal patterns emerged in the course of this thesis. One is distrust of occupying forces by Najaf's clerical establishment. This sentiment is also reflected in various anti-colonial *fatwās*. Another theme is advocacy for self-determination by high-ranking clerics, while also seeking to preserve the *ḥawza* institution. In addition to the commonly studied topic of *jihād fatwās*, this thesis highlighted how inter-faith and inter-sect dialogue play important roles in the agential role of Najaf's clerical authority in international relations. The intention was to highlight how these modes of advocacy are in fact, characteristic of the clerical authority's engagement in world politics.

The thesis highlighted Najaf's clerical authority's long history of commitment to international affairs, including engagements with institutions such as the League of Nations and the UN. These interactions often touched on issues in the inter-human domain, such as inter-faith and inter-sect solidarities, as well as self-determination at the inter-polity level. Examples of these themes can be seen in the correspondence between King George V and Najaf's sacred authority in 1916, Sistānī's engagement with the UN during Iraq's reconstruction period, Ban Ki-moon's visit to Najaf in 2014, and Pope Francis' recent meeting with Sistānī. These events portray a complex picture of the agential power through which Najaf's clerical authority pivots world politics. This is different to the generative power of Karbalāʾs ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented spaces and rituals which productively reproduce collective identity.

Perspectival Realism of Karbalāʾ

Chapter Five took a spatial approach to Karbalāʾs construction in world politics. It introduced the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage: an assemblage of contingent spatial devices in and around Karbalāʾ which generatively reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. Karbalāʾ is well known for housing the

shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn.[947] Less well known is the mini pilgrimage within Karbalāʾ based on historical sites relating to the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ. Given these sites represent historical aspects of ʿĀshūrāʾ, they possess a degree of generative power. Chapter Five used perspectival realism to demonstrate how Karbalāʾs major and minor pilgrimage sites represent a broader locus of pilgrimage and collective Shīʿī identity. These findings suggest a role for Shīʿī shrine cities as dynamic spaces of cultural heritage which reproduce collective identity. The spatial foundations in Chapter Five set the scene for Chapter Six's focus on textual and ritualistic expressions of collective identity.

A Recursive Cycle of Collective Identity Reproduction

Chapter Six examined how Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics through an analysis of its textual and ritual sources which productively reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. The chapter prioritised stipulative local understandings over lexical ontological constructs to illustrate this process. Textual sources such as Ḥadīth-based *zīyārat*-texts and non-Ḥadīth-based *zīyārat*-texts which directly encourage pilgrimage to the shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn are particularly productive in this regard. The fifth Infallible Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir and the sixth Infallible Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq issued a large number of ḥadīth-based *zīyārat*-texts in favour of Imām al-Ḥusayn. Other textual sources, such as *maqātil* literature and *marthiyahs*, which combine history and myth to potently reimagine the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ in contemporary terms are also productive sources of collective identity. Likewise, rituals like *taʿzīyah*, *tashābīh*, *Al-mawakib al-ḥusayniyya*, and *pāminbarī*, as well as ritual objects such as *alams* (banners), *mohrs* (small clay tablet), flags, and *turbah* (sacralised soil from Karbalāʾ), were

[947] Sutherland, "Contingent Devices".

shown to productively contribute to this reproduction collective Shīʿī identity without being identities in themselves. Overall, Chapter Six highlighted the powerful generative capacity of Karbalāʾs textual and ritual sources in shaping and sustaining collective Shīʿī identity.

This collective identity is strengthened by the social significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ and Imām al-Ḥusayn in world politics. As noted, beyond Shīʿī scholarship, several Sunnī and Christian scholars have written about the praiseworthy characteristics of Imām al-Ḥusayn. The story of ʿĀshūrāʾ as an archetypal narrative is mentioned in the works of Mahatma Gandhi, and several Shīʿī sources claim this story inspired revolutionaries from Che Guevara to Nelson Mandela.[948]

Rather than explain the motivations or intentions of individual actors, the 'Ḥusayni Impetus' and the recursive cycle of collective identity reproduction in Karbalāʾ depict the processes through which Karbalāʾ is constructed as a pivot in world politics. This includes the way in which its places, texts, rituals, and other elements contribute to the enhanced perceptual value of ʿĀshūrāʾ and the reproduction of a distinct collective identity. This cycle is recursive, as individuals who accept the religio-moral duty associated with Karbalāʾ give power to the place itself, which in turn furthers the reproduction of this collective identity. The 'Ḥusayni Impetus' is multimodal, as it involves a variety of sources such as texts, objects, and rituals, and socio-institutional manifestations including financial, artistic, medical, and scholarly endeavours. The multimodality of these phenomena contributes to the reproduction of collective identity. These processes capture various modalities of affect, offering a more complex perspective of

[948] During the course of my thesis research, I attended a few ʿĀshūrāʾ commemorations at a Canberra *ḥusayniyya* in the Australian Capital Territory. Several banners featuring Nelson Mandela quoting the events of Ashura were visible.

Karbalāʾs construction in world politics than the binary views often associated with the Karbalāʾ Paradigm.

Implications

This thesis has several implications. It illustrates how shrine cities are connected through Shīʿīsm, yet remain significant for distinct reasons. Najaf pivots world politics through the advocacy of its clerical establishment, while Karbalāʾ is a pivot in world politics through its reproduction of collective identity. The power of Karbalāʾ stems from its spatial reminder of ʿĀshūrāʾ, while Najaf's power is based on its temporal authority. Unlike existing research which focuses primarily on the link between holy cities and conflict, this thesis shifts attention to two diffuse sources of power that are inherent to holy cities: sacred authority and collective identity.[949] By examining Najaf's Shīʿī sacred authority and its role in world politics, this thesis contributes to extant literatures on Iraq's clerical authority in IR.[950] Furthermore, the examination of Karbalāʾs generative spatial power contributes to literature on the sociology of space and the power of place.[951] This approach integrates two previously distinct but related literatures on clerical authority and collective identity.[952]

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[949] Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*; Dumper, *Power and Piety*.

[950] Examples of sacred authority include Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism*, and Alshamary, "Prophets and Priests".

[951] See Antrim, *Routes and Realms*; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-geography of Becoming Places"; Loke and Owen, "Mapping Practices and Spatiality in IR Knowledge Production: From Detachment to Emancipation".

[952] Literature on Shīʿī clerical authority includes Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*; Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq*; Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt*; Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*; Sindawi, "Ḥawza Instruction and Its Role in Shaping Modern Shīʿīte Identity". Literature on collective Shīʿī identity includes Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*; Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*; Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbalāʾ*; Peter Chelkowski, *Taʾziyeh, Ritual and Drama in Iran*.

Reframing the Significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ: Exploring the Universal Appeal and Transnational Reach of Karbalāʾ-Inspired "Commitment Literature"

The first implication of this thesis is its examination of the underrepresented field of "Karbalāʾ studies" or "ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature" in mainstream social sciences. Typically, the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ and its significance are confined to literatures related to the history of the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide and the international relations of Iran. Some scholars describe the Karbalāʾ narrative as a master-narrative of Islamic extremism.[953] Others deploy the so-called Karbalāʾ Paradigm to explain the politically motivated state-sponsored violence of transient Shīʿa militias.[954] These views undermine the broader significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ in world politics, as a universal story that transcends historical and geopolitical divides within Islam and speaks to the shared human experience.

Instead, this thesis positions ʿĀshūrāʾ as an archetypal, universal story of salvation and justice over oppression for humanity, which has relevance beyond its historical context in the early schism of a non-Western faith and the geopolitics of one nation-state.[955] While Iran undoubtedly leverages the ʿĀshūrāʾ narrative to legitimise its political aims and objectives, a

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[953] Halverson, Goodall, Corman, eds., *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*.

[954] Saramifar, "Lamenting the Real and Crying for the Really Real"; Saramifar, "Circling Around the Really Real in Iran".

[955] Contemporaneously, the international system's isolation and sanctioning of the Islamic Republic of Iran mitigates exchanges in ideas and sociolinguistic interactions, contributing to a history of mutual misperception and mistrust. Beeman unpacks some elements of this problem in *The Great Satan vs. The Mad Mullah: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other*. However, rather than redress this issue, his thesis simply accentuates the political continuation of the problem. See William Beeman, *The Great Satan vs. The Mad Mullah: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

larger amorphous body of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature is continuously created and consumed worldwide, contributing to the construction of Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics and generative source of collective Shīʿī identity. Karbalāʾs reproduction of collective identity is a key factor in this, which is achieved through the various expressions of "literature of commitment" it inspires.[956] It achieves this because Imam al-Husayn functions as a liminal hero, like Jesus, who straddles the temporal and cosmic realms, between humanity and divinity.[957] As a liminal hero, he attains "victory through defeat, pleasure through suffering, eternality through mortality".[958]

Ultimately, this thesis contributes to the field of "Karbalāʾ studies" by highlighting its significance beyond the Sunnī-Shīʿa divide and Iran's geopolitics, and by illustrating the role of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature in shaping this collective identity. The productive ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented literature that emerges from the Karbalāʾ narrative justifies this broader understanding of ʿĀshūrāʾ. This 'commitment literature', as it is described in this thesis and elsewhere, is composed and consumed around the Shīʿī world, not only in English and Arabic but also in

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[956] "Literature of commitment" refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of "engaged literature" (*literature engagée*). See Jean-Paul Satre, *What is Literature?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Some examples include Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mains Sales* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). Through his literary journal *al-Ādāb*, Suhail Idrīs was a key proponent of "literature of commitment", also known as "commitment literature" or simply "committed literature", in the Muslim world. See Verena Klemm, "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq", *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 3:1 (2000): 51-62. Qutbuddin demonstrates a tradition of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented "committed literature" of the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī Shīʿa of India. See Tahera Qutbuddin, "Karbala Mourning among the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī Shīʿa of India: Doctrinal and Performative Aspects of Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's Arabic Marthiya, "O King of Martyrs" (Yā Sayyida l-Shuhadāʾī)", *Shii Studies Review* 5:1 (2021): 3-46.

[957] Perkins, "The Thirst, and the Sun, and the Bleeding".

[958] *Ibid*, 254.

Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Dari, Hazaragi, Hausa, Kirundi, Swahili.[959] This literature, which originated orally in the 8th century has evolved into a transnational genre that not only preserves but also reproduces collective Shīʿī identity on a global scale. Its significance lies in its ability to inspire and mobilise the Shīʿī community around the world, creating a shared sense of identity and purpose based on the themes of salvation and justice over oppression that ʿĀshūrāʾ represents. The global reach and impact of this committed or engaged literature underscores its relevance beyond its immediate context, demonstrating the broader significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ and Karbalāʾ in world politics.

Cultural Cartography and Collective Identity: The Intersection of Generative Spatiality and Productive Anthropological Heritage

The second implication of this thesis is the utility of cultural heritage in understanding Karbalāʾs generative reproduction of collective identity. While sociology and anthropology are distinct disciplines, they overlap in their empirical approaches. The spatial approach used in Chapter Five to examine the generative power of Karbalāʾ as a pivot in world politics complements the analytic insights of anthropological heritage, which collectively demonstrate how cultural representation and heritage productively reproduce a collective identity. Through this approach, spatiality illuminates the theoretical underpinnings of Karbalāʾs generative power, while anthropological heritage highlights its productive sources of collective identity.

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[959] Mara A. Leichtman, *Shi'i Cosmopolitanism in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Musa Ibrahim, "Sunni and Shia Muslim and Christian Encounters in Northern Nigeria", *Africa* 92:5 (2022): 678-698; Gerard C. Van De Bruinhorst, "A Confirmation of What Went Before It': Historicising the Shi'i Swahili Qur'an Translation by Ali Jumaa Mayunga", in *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa*, eds. Zulfikhar Hirji (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 189-230; Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Boivin, "Sufism and Shi'ism in South Asia: Shahādat and the Evidence of the Sindhi *Marthiya*".

Anderson's notion of an 'imagined community' and the importance of textuality resembles the array of ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented textual sources that sustain and reproduce collective Shīʿī identity. Additionally, his observation of the power of replicas as "cognitive signposts" illustrates how sites and spaces within the ʿĀshūrāʾ Assemblage represent a "living pilgrimage" as described by Quinn.[960] More broadly, Karbalāʾs cultural landscape represents what Pemberton calls a "topography of power".[961] These rich cultural heritage insights raise questions about the effectiveness of IR in adequately illuminating geographical methodological units of significance in world politics. The relative value of this approach will depend on the reader's vocational preferences. Some readers may find interest in Chapters Three and Four's processual temporal approach to historical IR. Others may be more intrigued by the way in which spatiality and anthropological heritage coalesce to reveal a dimension of spatial power that is both generative and productive.

Beyond Conflict: Shīʿī Shrine Cities as Methodological Units in World Politics

The third implication of this thesis suggests a larger role for non-Western holy cities, and methodological units for that matter, in IR. It prompts IR to look beyond 'global cities' and thematic understandings of holy cities as sites of conflict and contestation by arguing that spatial organisations beyond the state are important methodological units in IR.[962] The impact

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[960] Anderson, *Language and Power*, 179; Quinn, *Bandit Saints of Java*, 14.

[961] Pemberton, *On the Subject of "Java"*, 270.

[962] This argument is not new. In 1993, Ruggie brought attention to the fact that traditional IR theory treats political units, specifically states, as expressions of Western modernity, resulting in their reification in mainstream IR theory. See John G. Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations", *International Organization* 47:1 (1993): 139-174; John Agnew, "The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory", *Review of International Political Economy* 1:1 (1994): 53-80; Sanjay Chaturvedi and Joe Painter, "Whose World, Whose Order? Spatiality, Geopolitics and the Limits

of ‘global cities’ on world politics is widely recognised in IR. However, existing conceptions fail to account for the instrumental role holy cities, such as Shīʿī shrine cities, play in world politics. IR’s interest in holy cities is limited to viewing holy cities as sites of “conflict and contestation”.[963] While these claims are not entirely invalid, they undermine IR’s potential to test hypotheses instead of merely confirming them. In contrast, this thesis explores different dimensions of power among shrine cities within the same faith, rather than focusing on similarities between select cities across different faiths.

This thesis sheds light on the unique ways in which shrine cities pivot world politics. In doing so, it challenges existing IR frameworks to broaden their scope beyond conventional tropes of urban conflict. Mainstream IR is not well-equipped to theorise sacred cities of a minority sect within a non-Western religion. Islam is often treated monolithically or in dyadic terms. Its focus on the Vatican as the key transnational religious authority in world politics exposes Euro-centric and western-centric biases ingrained within the discipline. This thesis challenges this wisdom by demonstrating how non-Western religious authority has the potential to challenge imperial forms of power spanning two centuries and two empires, namely colonial Britain and 21st century American imperialism.

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of the World Order Concept”, *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association* 42:4 (2007): 375-395; For a thought-provoking examination of the development of the international system of sovereign states, see Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[963] Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*; Dumper, *Power, Piety, and People*.

Spatial and Temporal Dimensions of Power: A Semantical Respecification of Pivots

The final implication of this thesis is its potential portability. Temporality and spatiality are both peripheral concepts in IR.[964] Sacred authority and collective identity are common themes which carry across various faiths and spatial scales. Examining clerical authority involves a temporal approach that analyses how a specific clerical authority impacts local, regional, and global dynamics through agential authority, and the impact this has on various audiences. Thinking in spatial and temporal terms about a novel phenomenon such as shrine cities, this thesis advocates for IR scholars to look outside the window of the "Prison of Political Science".[965] By sticking to a simple yet novel theoretical template of temporal and spatial, agential and generative pivots, this thesis avoids the pitfalls of Eurocentrism, state-centrism and racism that plague IR. The stipulative framework is based on literal linguistic definitions of 'pivot' empirically informed by local understandings, as an alternative to existing lexical definitions and theoretical constructs.[966]

Traditional IR's fixation on modes of power is statically wedded to state-centric conceptions of power. As argued throughout this thesis, spatiality and temporality are powerful dimensions of power. However, both approaches sit on the periphery of IR. This poses both conceptual and substantive challenges for how IR thinks about 'power'. Notions such as Global International

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[964] Hom, *International Relations and the Problem of Time*.

[965] Justin Rosenberg, "International Relations in the Prison of Political Science", *International Relations* 30:2 (2016): 127-153; Justin Rosenberg, "Escaping from the Prison of Political Science: What IR Offers that Other Disciplines Do Not", in *What's The Point of International Relations*, eds. Synne L. Dyvik, Jan Selby and Rorden Wilkinson (London: Routledge, 2017), 219-230.

[966] Such as Mackinder's "pivot" theory which is both Eurocentric and racist.

Relations (GIR), Global International Society (GIS), 'deep pluralism', 'relational cosmologies', and 'societal multiplicity' highlight important pathways for overcoming IR's self-limiting disciplinary orientations.[967] However, they do not provide substantive solutions to these conceptual issues. As Waever notes, "you only become a star by doing theory".[968] This parochial trajectory for IR privileges generalisability above case-study specific knowledge production and begs the questions "what is a star" and "what constitutes 'theory'"?. To achieve 'stardom', one must, through acknowledgement, reproduce this parochial conception of IR. All of which arguably militates against the goals of GIR for a more inclusive theoretical approach to doing IR. To substantiate this claim, it worth pointing to Halliday's precocious and prolific identification of the tension between international theory and the Middle East.[969]

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[967] For GIR, GIS and deep pluralism, see Acharya, "Advancing Global IR: Challenges, Contentions, and Contributions"; Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*; Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*; Buzan and Acharya, *Re-imagining International Relations; Flockhart and Paikin, eds., Rebooting Global International Society*; Zhang, ed., *Pluralism and World Order*; Spruyt, *The World Imagined*. For multiplicity and cosmologies, see Justin Rosenberg and Milja Kurki, eds., *Multiplicity: A New Common Ground for International Relations?* (London: Routledge, 2021); Bentley B. Allan, *Scientific Cosmology and International Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); William Bain, *Theology of International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Milja Kurki, *International Relations in A Relational Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Giorgio Shani and Navnita Chadha Behera, "Provincialising International Relations Through a Reading of *Dharma*", *Review of International Studies* 48:5 (2022): 837-856; Amaya Querejazu, "*Cosmopraxis*: Relational Methods for a Pluriversal IR", *Review of International Studies* 48:5 (2022): 875-890.

[968] Ole Weaver, "The Sociology of a Not so International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations", *International Organization* 52:4 (1998): 687-727, 716.

[969] Fred Halliday, "'Orientalism' and Its Critics", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:2 (1993): 145-163; Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1994); Fred Halliday, "The Potentials of Enlightenment", *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 105-125; Fred Halliday, "The Middle East and the Politics of Differential Integration", in *Globalisation and the Middle East: Islam, Economics, Culture and Politics* eds., Toby Dodge and Richard Higgott (London and Washington: Royal Institute of International Affairs and Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 42-45; Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Halliday considered theoretical pluralism as: "desirable, provided that each of the theories generates a research agenda that leads to substantive analysis".[970] This thesis used theoretical pluralism to foreground substantive analysis of two distinct but associated dimensions of power inherent to the construction of Shīʿī shrine cities in world politics. Halliday emphasised the importance of temporality noting:

> International relations exists as an academic subject because of, and in permanent tension with, the world of history and events. This, the most enduring source of discontent, is the one that should above all others be welcomed.[971]

This thesis' temporal focus accommodates this conceptual fact that robust interpretations of the region are intimately tied to their historical context. This point is also associated to the issue of social scientific methodology and philosophy in the international relations. Halliday noted that both "need to be handled on the basis of an adequate grounding the general literature on the subject".[972] This thesis' temporal and spatial approach leans towards the analytic side of this equation, invoking theory where necessary while relying on substantive analysis. In his words,

> The history of to which IR relates needs to be re-thought in light of changes informed by a richer social science culture in the study of history itself. But there is another reason why a historical dimension, suitably defined is essential for the study of IR: it can help to place the present in perspective.[973]

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[970] Fred Halliday, "The Future of International Relations: Fears and Hopes", in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds., Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 318-328, 322.

[971] Fred Halliday, "International Relations and Its Discontents", *International Affairs* 71:4 (1995): 733- 746, 746.

[972] Halliday, "The Future of International Relations", 324.

[973] *Ibid*, 324.

Chapter One's considerable historical scope aspires to meet this call. It did so by tracing the early emergence of collective Shīʿī identity and the distinct structures of clerical authority. It analysed the historical pattern of imperial interest in shrine cities from the Mongols and Timurids to the British through the Oudh Bequest, as necessary context to the discourse on the so-called "Shīʿī Crescent" which has emerged in the past decade. Dodge makes the point that "Halliday argued, quite rightly, that Khomeini and his revolutionary *ulema* were a very modern phenomenon, utilizing mass mobilization and nationalism, while dressing themselves up in the rhetoric of a return to the pre-modern utopia".[974] This partly explains this thesis' peripheral engagement with Iran as a legitimate stakeholder in the broader history of Shīʿī shrine cities in world politics.

This thesis does not provide a solution to these important methodological considerations. However, it charts a more *inclusive* IR by broadening what constitutes IR, by questioning whether existing IR vocabularies are sufficient for the complex relational universes social agents inhabit, and by questioning whether they require expansion or respecification. It does so by utilising two dimensions of IR typically regarded as self-evident: temporal and spatial – to demonstrate how these distinct modes of power: generative and agential, are evident in shrine cities through a semantical respecification of 'pivots'.[975] This respecification of 'pivots' could prove portable in conceptualising methodological units of significance in world politics.

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[974] Toby Dodge, "Fred Halliday: High Modernism and a Social Science of the Middle East", *International Affairs* 87:5 (2011): 1141-1158, 1153.

[975] Advances for a "global" disciplinary turn are not limited to IR and extend more broadly to sociology and the humanities. Similarly, the promotion of perspectival realism as a useful approach has precedence. See

As shown throughout this thesis, clerical authority can pivot regional dynamics by directing followers to vote, abstain from tobacco, or take up arms in defence of holy sites. Furthermore, sacred authority can impact regional dynamics by engaging international audiences ranging from institutions of international society such as the League of Nations or the UN, or through engagement with other religious organisations such as the Holy See. Conversely, examining collective identity involved a spatial approach. This thesis demonstrated the generative power of specific sacred spaces, rituals, and textual cosmologies in reproducing collective identity. Because important religious or cultural sites often possess a generative power in preserving and sustaining a specific collective identity, this framework could extend to other holy cities where sacred authority or collective identity are particularly salient.

Directions for Future Research: Methodological Units As 'Pivots'

An extension of this project could look at the other two cities contained within the *Al-ʿAtabāt Al-Aliyat* (The sublime thresholds): Kadhimiya and Sāmarrāʾ. Kadhimiya contains the tombs of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and his grandson Muḥammad al-Jawād, the seventh and ninth Shīʿī Imāms. Sāmarrāʾs al-ʿAskarī mosque contains the tombs of Ali al-Hādī and his son Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the tenth and eleventh Shīʿī Imāms.[976] The procedure could also be used to explore other Shīʿī

George Lawson and Julian Go, eds., *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Julian Go, "Globalizing Sociology, Turning South: Perspectival Realism and the Southern Standpoint", *Sociologia* 10:2 (2016): 1-42.

[976] Sāmarrāʾ represents an interesting case study because its history includes periods of clerical authority in the 18th and 19th centuries and represents an important fault line of collective identity. During the late 19th century, Mirza Hasan Shirazi aimed to establish Sāmarrāʾ as a hub for the transnational spread of Shiʿism. During this time, Shirazi was able to fund over 500 students and *akhunds* (stipends for clerics) in his seminary in Sāmarrāʾ. See Üstü, "The Ottoman Dilemma in Handling the Shi'i Challenge in Nineteenth

shrine cities outside Iraq such as those in Iran. Mashhad, for example, houses the shrine of Imām Reza, the eighth Imām in Shīʿī Islam.[977] In addition, Qom is the centre of Shīʿī scholarship in Iran.[978] It also houses the shrine of Fāṭimah Maʿṣūmah, the sister of Imām Reza and daughter of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, the seventh Imām in Shīʿī Islam. Finally, the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz houses the tomb of Ahmed Bin Mūsā, Mūsā al-Kāẓim's son and Imām Reza's brother.

Other potential avenues for research may use this procedure to understand how holy cities within faiths outside Islam pivot world politics. Jerusalem and Rome are examples of Christian holy cities, with Jerusalem, being where Jesus spent much of his life and Rome encompassing the Vatican City, which is regarded as the spiritual home of the Pope and the centre of the Catholic Church. There are several Hindu sites which could be explored in similar fashion to this thesis. The Sapta Puri (seven cities) are seven holy Hindu pilgrimage centres in India. They include Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Ujjain and Dwarka. Each of these cities have different modes of significance which warrant further investigation.

Century Iraq", 94-95; Imranali Panjwani, eds., *The Shiʿa of Samarra: The Heritage and Politics of a Community in Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

[977] Mashhad represents an interesting case of collective identity. The Goharshad Mosque was funded by the Timurids and gained more religious significance during the Safavid Empire.

[978] The case of Qom's clerical authority would prove an insightful case study, particularly a grand historical approach examining its institution before and after the 1979 revolution. For evidence of this, see Mohammadjavad Ardalan, "The Life and Work of a Grand Ayatollah in Historical Context: The Contribute of Ayatollah Ḥājj Āqā Ḥusayn Burūjirdī (1875-1961) to Shiʿi Theology and the Development of the Religious Institution in the 20th Century Iran", (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2013).

The procedure could also be used to study Judaist and Buddhist holy cities. In Judaism, Jerusalem and Tiberias are both significant holy cities, with Jerusalem being the site of the Western Wall and the Temple Mount, and Tiberias being the burial place of several Jewish sages and a centre of Jewish learning and religious life. In Buddhism, Lhasa and Shigatse are both significant sites for Tibetan Buddhists, with Lhasa being the cultural and political centre of Tibet, while Shigatse is the seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the highest-ranking figures in Tibetan Buddhism. Likewise, Dharamsala and Leh are also significant Tibetan-Buddhist holy sites. Dharamsala is the headquarters of the Dalai Lama and the centre of the Tibetan exile community, while Leh is a centre of Tibetan Buddhism and home to several monasteries and nunneries. All these cases could, in theory, utilise this thesis' agential clerical authority and generative collective identity framework.

Limitations

Several challenges arose while conducting this research. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted initial plans for fieldwork and fellowship in 2020. A digital ethnographic method involving synchronous and asynchronous interviews with various interlocutors associated to Imām-al Ḥusayn's shrine in Karbalāʾ was implemented as an alternative solution. Although this method had some limitations, such as a reduced pool of participants and restricted topics, it allowed the focus of the research to shift from socio-political topics such as regional security to religio-social issues such as collective Shīʿī identity and urban geography.

This limitation also provided an opportunity for extended asynchronous and iterative interviews to take place over longer periods of time than would typically be possible during traditional fieldwork. Due to word constraints and the difficulties of fieldwork, the depictions

of both Najaf and Karbalāʾ in this thesis are limited in scope and focus on two specific imperial encounters in which Najaf's clerical authority exercised significant agency through *fatwās* and other forms of advocacy. This thesis focused on imperial encounters to gain insight into how shrine cities can have a significant impact on world politics.

It is important to note that this study only examined a few aspects of collective Shīʿī identity in Karbalāʾ and was unable to explore other important factors. The modest sample size also means these findings should not be assumed to be generalisable or representative of all Shīʿī shrine cities. Furthermore, because representational abstractions were used, they are necessarily partial, perspectival, restrictive, and cannot be considered generalisable or beyond question. Despite these limitations, the findings in these chapters offer useful, novel, and informative ways of thinking about how Karbalāʾ reproduces collective Shīʿī identity.

Intended Audiences

This thesis is primarily aimed at students of West-Asia Area-Studies with an interest in Shīʿīsm and international relations. However, the approach used in the thesis may appeal to wider audiences. Scholars interested in Najaf's clerical authority, transnational Shīʿa militias, and imperialism in the Middle East will find value in Chapters Three and Four. While only focusing on two distinct temporal contexts, these chapters cast a spotlight Najaf's clerical authority and its engagement with world politics in a way that few studies have done before.[979] These chapters are also relevant to scholars working on historical IR, transnational activism, and state-society relations in Iraq. Scholars interested in Karbalāʾs cultural landscape, ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented

[979] Alshamary's study on clerical participation in protest movement being the first.

rituals and objects, and textual cosmologies will find Chapters Five and Six particularly useful. These chapters are relevant to scholars working on historical sociology, political geography, and collective Shīʿī identity, memory and ritual. Beyond academia, this research intends to reach a broader non-scholarly audience interested in "Karbalāʾ Studies". A vast majority of Shīʿa Muslims do not share the scholarly fascination with 'sectarianism' that many Western scholars of the Middle East do. In doing so, it intends to engage a larger audience of readers beyond traditional scholarly circles.

Positionality Statement

It is important to consider the researcher's positionality when studying human experience, as it clarifies the context, limitations, and scope of the research. It is also important to acknowledge the researcher's biases, because all knowledge is perspectival and inevitably influenced by implicit and explicit biases. My position as a white, non-Muslim, able-bodied Australian male studying at the Australian National University is a perpetual positional factor that does not change. This position constructs me as an 'outsider' looking in, but it does not make my research more objective than that of an insider, as objectivity is a goal that almost all scholarship attempts to achieve. However, my position does affect the trajectory of the research. By thoughtfully considering multiple, accountable viewpoints, social scientists can get closer to more robust interpretations of events.

There are also sporadic factors that shift and change during the research process, such as my position shifting from the beginning to the end of the research. My use of digital ethnography allowed me to reflect on and adjust conversations to suit the direction of the interviewees, which in turn enabled me to explore various topics over the course of the interview period.

While my informants were deeply religious, I am aware that this is not the entirety of their identities. Religiosity is one of the few topics that is safe to discuss online. As a non-Muslim studying Islamic holy cities, I acknowledge that my research is perspectival. Islam, like all religions, has implicit and explicit forms of stratification. This thesis does not address these forms of stratification but it does not deny them either.[980]

I attempted to invite females in order to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on ʿĀshūrāʾ rituals, but all potential female informants directed me to a male relative. In addition, many other potential interviewees I invited to participate in an interview were unwilling to engage in the research, and some even suspected that I was a spy. For example, several potential Iranian participants accused me of being Israeli, while a number of Iraqi participants accused me of working on behalf of Iran. These suspicions are understandable given the online nature of the research, and I am grateful to the participants who agreed to take part. I tried to make the most of this research opportunity while also aiming to achieve a sense of critical distance from those I interviewed.

Although my sample size was modest, as a male from a reputable university, I was able to engage interlocuters other may not have. I attempted to give back to the scholars who helped with my research by participating in ʿĀshūrāʾ-oriented events. In 2021, I served as a referee for English-language poetry in the "International Islamic Ritual Poetry Festival", where I read around 600 poems on ʿĀshūrāʾ written by participants from around the world. This experience

[980] In a separate ethnographic study on Hazara migrants in Australia, I highlighted forms of religious and communal stratification limiting pathways to advancements. See Aidan Parkes, "Afghan-Hazara Migration and Relocation in a Globalised Australia", *Religion* 11:12 (2020): 670.

reinforced my belief in the enduring relevance of ʿĀshūrāʾ in contemporary world affairs and its centrality to collective Shīʿī identity.

Interviews Conducted

Dr. Sayyid Ahmad Salmaan Aal To'mah. September 2021.

Qom based religio-pragmatics pioneer. September 2021.

Karbalāʾ based Shiʿi intellectual. September 2021.

Karbalāʾ based Shiʿi intellectual. September 2021

Najaf based Shiʿi intellectual. September 2021.

Najaf based Shiʿi intellectual. September 2021.

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